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Chairman: Mr. Galuška ..... (Czech Republic)

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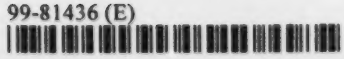

The meeting was called to order at 10.10 a.m.

Agenda item 106: Social development, including questions relating to the world social situation and to youth, ageing, disabled persons and the family (A/54/3, A/54/56, A/54/57, A/54/59, A/54/61 and Corr.1, A/54/62, A/54/66-E/1999/6, A/54/98, A/54/128-E/1999/70, A/54/256, A/54/268 and A/54/388; A/C.3/54/L.2)

1. **Mr. Langmore** (Director, Division for Social Policy and Development) said that the report of the Secretary-General on the implementation of the World Programme of Action for Youth to the Year 2000 and Beyond (A/54/59) highlighted the efforts of Governments, the United Nations system, regional and other intergovernmental bodies, youth non-governmental organizations and others to implement the recommendations of the World Programme of Action. The report also reviewed the outcome of the World Conference of Ministers Responsible for Youth, held in Portugal in 1998.

2. Young people's situation and their prospects were closely linked to the general economic and social conditions in their communities, particularly in developing countries, where youth made up a large proportion of the population.

3. Young people also faced special challenges. While all societies had their rites of passage, the customary methods of ensuring the transition from childhood to adulthood were often inadequate to the challenges posed by increasingly complex economies. Public policies must be centred outside the home in order to prepare young people for a productive life and enable social institutions to adapt to the needs of rising generations.

4. The link between current and future generations was clearly reflected in the theme for the International Year of Older Persons, namely, "a society for all ages". The impact of the year was already evident in the expanded role of the United Nations programme on ageing, as described in the report of the Secretary-General (A/54/268). The programme priorities included the continued elaboration of the policy framework for a society for all ages, the further elaboration of the research agenda on ageing for the twenty-first century, and the development of an Internet-accessible database of innovative policy approaches and projects. Plans under way for the years 2000, 2001 and 2002 would promote a shift from a view of societal ageing as a problem to a more positive but still realistic view.

5. While it was a normal life experience to be young and, for more and more people, to be old, to be disabled was different. Disability could happen to anyone at any time and it could take any number of forms. Disability called for specific responses within the broader framework set by the World Summit for Social Development (Copenhagen, 1995) of advancing "a society for all".

6. His Division regretted the late issuance of the report of the Secretary-General on the implementation of the World Programme of Action concerning Disabled Persons (A/54/388) and hoped that the wealth of information it contained would be of value to Member States.

7. One out of every three or four families experienced disability at one time or another, and to the extent that caring for disabled persons was a burden, much of it fell on families.

8. The report of the Secretary-General on the follow-up to the International Year of the Family (A/54/256) highlighted the activities of Governments, the United Nation system, and non-governmental and academic institutions. It underscored the need to develop common ground and common understanding among constituencies viewing family issues from different perspectives.

9. Paragraph 8 of the report outlined the major recommendations, namely, improving the knowledge base through research, data collection and collaboration at all levels, building local capacity in developing countries and countries with economies in transition, and giving attention to the most appropriate way of observing the tenth anniversary of the International Year of the Family in 2004 in order to strengthen follow-up.

10. Lastly, the report of the Secretary-General on the status and role of cooperatives (A/54/57) contained the results of the Secretary-General's survey, carried out in cooperation with the Committee for the Promotion and Advancement of Cooperatives, on the desirability and feasibility of elaborating United Nations guidelines aimed at creating a supportive environment for the development of cooperatives. In response to the Secretary-General's questionnaire to Governments, replies had been received from 40 governmental agencies in 37 countries. The questionnaire had also been transmitted to national cooperative organizations, 56 of which had replied. The questionnaire had asked whether Governments were willing to participate in and contribute to the elaboration of United Nations guidelines. Among the Governments replying to the question, none had been explicitly unwilling to participate, which his Division took to mean that all supported the idea.

11. **Mr. Legwaila** (Botswana), speaking on behalf of the Southern African Development Community (SADC), said

that the countries concerned remained committed to addressing critical issues of social development, including poverty eradication, the expansion of productive employment, education for all, women's empowerment and social integration. Nevertheless, if any real and sustainable impact was to be made on poverty, sufficient economic growth must be generated to finance the various initiatives outlined in the Copenhagen Programme of Action.

12. Many SADC countries had been unable to achieve such growth, owing mainly to external factors. An average growth rate of from 3 per cent to 3 5 per cent was predicted for the SADC countries in 1999, largely as a result of sound macroeconomic policies. Such growth fell far short, however, of the 6 per cent needed to reduce poverty.

13. Despite the far-reaching and often painful economic reforms undertaken by the SADC countries, foreign direct investment was only beginning to trickle in. Regrettably, official development assistance had declined steadily throughout the years. Those factors had strengthened the resolve of the SADC countries to further mobilize their own human, financial and technical resources for reinvestment in the region.

14. Nevertheless, the region's social transformation process continued to be impeded by the external debt burden. The channelling of resources to debt servicing greatly undermined the efforts to provide basic social services. While SADC welcomed current international efforts to address the debt problem, such as the Heavily Indebted Poor Countries Initiative (HIPC), it believed that more could be done, not only to alleviate the debt burden but to cancel the debt once and for all.

15. The 1998/1999 agricultural season had been characterized by sporadic rainfall owing to the El Niño phenomenon. The well-being of the region's people, particularly poor rural women, had been further undermined. Food security and a safe water supply in the more arid countries of the region could not be fully ensured.

16. In the area of peace and security, the region continued to experience serious setbacks caused by conflicts in Angola and the Democratic Republic of the Congo. The problem of refugees and internally displaced persons posed a particular challenge to the Community. The plight of women and children was compounded by sexual and other abuses perpetrated against them in a chaotic and lawless environment. Despite financial and physical constraints, SADC member States were doing their utmost to provide assistance to refugees and displaced persons, and they called upon the international community to support their efforts.

17. SADC was committed to providing education for all in as short a time as possible. Primary school enrolment had increased substantially since 1995. Particular importance was attached to bridging the gap between boys' and girls' enrolment.

18. If SADC was to transform itself into an industrial and information-led region, attention should be paid to vocational training and literacy campaigns, particularly those aimed at women and youth. The Community noted with satisfaction the progress made by the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO) towards the goal of education for all by the year 2000 (A/54/128). They also looked forward to the World Youth Forum to be held in Senegal in 2000.

19. While the lack of basic health care and nutrition were the most pressing problems facing the elderly, an additional burden of caring for orphaned grandchildren increasingly affected elderly women in the SADC region. The Community was eager to benefit from the experience and best practices of other countries in that area.

20. The HIV/AIDS pandemic continued to take a toll on the region, with serious implications for all sectors of the economy. The advances achieved, particularly in the health sector, would be reversed if the epidemic was not checked. The burden on national budgets was unsustainable. Youth, women and girls were disproportionately affected by HIV/AIDS.

21. A protocol on health had been signed at the recent SADC summit held at Maputo, Mozambique, outlining regional health strategies with an emphasis on HIV/AIDS. Furthermore, a high-level conference on HIV/AIDS and sexually transmitted diseases in Africa had been held at Lusaka, Zambia, in September. The SADC countries appealed for the support of the international community in addressing those urgent problems.

22. **Mr. Aarset** (Norway), speaking as a youth representative, urged Member States to implement the Youth Action Plan adopted at the third session of the World Youth Forum of the United Nations system, held at Braga, Portugal, in 1998. While the offer of the Government of Senegal to host the next session of the World Youth Forum outside Europe was welcome, the Braga Youth Action Plan should be implemented further before the fourth session was held. To hold it in 2000 would not give youth organizations sufficient time to prepare. Accordingly, Norwegian youth organizations believed that the fourth session should take place in 2001.

23. The World Conference of Ministers Responsible for Youth, held at Lisbon in 1998, had called for the strengthening of the Youth Unit of the Secretariat. Without the necessary resources, the Youth Unit would not be able to promote the World Programme of Action for Youth to the Year 2000 and Beyond, as envisioned by Member States.

24. His Government had included youth representatives in its delegation to the General Assembly for almost 30 years, and it recommended that all Member States do the same. Youth interests in the United Nations system could be fully represented only by young people themselves.

25. A United Nations report on young people's influence on and representation in society, especially in political decision-making, would be very useful. That should be the theme of a United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) human development report.

26. Many of the world's poor countries spent more on debt repayment than on education, health care and basic services combined. Unsustainable debt should be cancelled; the international debt-relief mechanisms should be strengthened and improved; and debtor and creditor countries should work together to find flexible solutions.

27. In a world of increasing globalization, new threats to human rights, as well as new opportunities for the implementation of human-rights instruments, were emerging. The increased openness of Governments and the private sector in many countries gave youth and consumers an opportunity to advance human rights and democracy. In his country, for example, some companies placed a higher priority on ethical standards in investing in and trading with other countries because they had found that ethical behaviour was advantageous to all in the long run.

28. Non-governmental organizations formed the basis of civil society in every country. They were important channels for democracy and vehicles for freedom of expression. Young people had often been at the forefront of the fight for tolerance and human rights and against racism and xenophobia. The involvement of young people and their organizations in the preparations for the World Conference against Racism, Racial Discrimination, Xenophobia and Related Intolerance, was of great importance for the attainment of its goals.

29. **Mr. Kallehauge** (Denmark) said that the second monitoring period for the implementation of the United Nations Standard Rules for Equalization of Opportunities for Persons with Disabilities would end in August 2000. The mandate of the Special Rapporteur on disability of the Commission for Social Development was expiring. It was time to evaluate what had been achieved and to consider new initiatives. A third monitoring period might not be the best option.

30. Government funding had been weaker during the second period, and innovation was needed. The Commission for Social Development should mainstream the disability dimension into its work by implementing the United Nations Standard Rules.

31. At the regional level, good results had been achieved through the Asian and Pacific Decade of Disabled Persons (1993-2002) under the auspices of the Economic and Social Commission for Asia and the Pacific (ESCAP). Recently, a group of African countries had recommended the launching of an African decade for the period 2000-2010. The great advantage of regional initiatives was that they allowed plans of action to be targeted to the specific needs of countries in the region.

32. Regional plans with a lifespan of a decade or less should be supported by United Nations inter-agency meetings to be held once a year in all regions. Such meetings should be arranged by the respective United Nations regional office in close cooperation with the regional development bank. The meetings should be attended by regional and national non-governmental organizations and by disabled persons. If representatives from donor countries participated as well, such annual conferences would no doubt be instrumental in promoting equal opportunities for persons with disabilities.

33. **Ms. Mariegaard** (Denmark), speaking as a youth representative, said that sustainable development required the active involvement of young people in decision-making and in the design and implementation of programmes. Many youth organizations were ready to contribute their experiences and ideas through pilot projects in cooperation with Governments and international development agencies.

34. In order to involve young people in development, their rights must be guaranteed, including the right to make their own choices regarding education and employment and to determine freely when to have children. Currently, however, only a few young people enjoyed substantial freedom in making choices crucial to their lives.

35. More knowledge was needed about youth, their perceptions and their hopes for the future. Such knowledge was also necessary if Governments and international organizations were to further the implementation of the World Programme of Action for Youth to the Year 2000 and Beyond.

36. Her Government and the Danish Youth Council therefore encouraged UNDP to give special attention to youth in its annual *Human Development Report* and to consider making youth the theme of a future human development report, for instance, in 2001, when the conference to follow up the World Summit for Children would be held.

37. **Mrs. Wahid** (Bangladesh) said that her country's National Committee on Ageing had made comprehensive recommendations for ensuring that older persons could lead dignified and fruitful lives. The Government had introduced an old-age allowance, undertaken a project to provide social security to distressed and older persons and built shelters for older persons who lacked family or community support. It had also finalized its national plan for older persons, which would address issues relating to physical and psychological well-being, economic advancement and involvement in cultural activities.

38. Bangladesh had welcomed the adoption of the World Programme of Action for Youth to the Year 2000 and Beyond. Young people made up one third of Bangladesh's population. The Government was updating its national youth policy to make it more relevant to the current and future needs of youth in Bangladesh. The policy focused on measures to ensure grass-roots participation in youth programmes, the full integration of young people into national development and the implementation of a self-employment programme with microcredit facilities. Other programmes were being implemented to offer leadership training to young people, especially in rural areas; to provide education and health services; and to prevent drug abuse.

39. Bangladesh had adopted a national policy for disabled persons and a plan for its implementation. It would work closely with non-governmental organizations in providing education, training, economic opportunities and rehabilitation programmes for the disabled.

40. **Ms. Nishitateno** (Japan) said that 1999 had been a year of great significance for social development, marked not only by further initiatives to implement the Copenhagen Declaration, but by the observance of the International Year of Older Persons, which had raised global awareness on ageing. Its great impact on the attitudes of the international community was evident in the plenary meetings of the General Assembly devoted to the topic. Many delegations had emphasized the importance of enabling older persons to live their lives in security and dignity, of maintaining a positive perspective on ageing and of devoting attention to the issue of ageing in developing countries and to needs of older women in particular. Her delegation shared those concerns. Observance of the International Year of Older Persons had strengthened the foundation for international efforts in the coming millennium. Her delegation was particularly pleased by the formation of a global network of non-governmental organizations. The Government of Japan would continue to collaborate with other Member States on a long-term strategy on ageing and a review of the International Plan of Action on Ageing.

41. With regard to the issue of persons with disabilities, her delegation stressed the importance of policies aimed at providing the disabled with accessibility, social services and social safety nets, and employment and sustainable livelihoods. Recent developments in information and telecommunications technology had increased the access of persons with disabilities to information in all areas and hence facilitated their participation in social activities. As part of its efforts to build a society free of information barriers, the Government of Japan in 1998 had established guidelines on accessibility of telecommunications equipment for persons with disabilities. It was also promoting research and development for such systems, such as a graphical user interface which facilitated access to multimedia information. In projects in developing countries intended to provide equal opportunity to persons with disabilities, Japan stressed capacity-building. Her delegation hoped that international cooperation in the field could be further enhanced through, for example, the efforts of the United Nations Voluntary Fund on Disability.

42. As the international community redoubled its efforts to enhance the momentum generated thus far, it should take the human-centred approach reflected in the Copenhagen Declaration as a fundamental principle.

43. **Mr. Ka** (Senegal) said that his delegation wished to express its appreciation for the high quality of the Secretary-General's reports on the topics covered by the agenda item. Although significant progress had been made towards the goals described in the reports, many obstacles remained and had been magnified by recent financial and humanitarian crises and the challenges of globalization currently facing developing countries.

44. The Secretary-General's report on cooperatives (A/54/57) underscored the diversity of the laws governing cooperatives and the major changes they were undergoing. In Senegal, the positive role of cooperatives in achieving the Government's economic and social objectives was recognized, and the law provided for their independence and autonomy, whether rural or farm cooperatives, mutual societies, production associations or housing cooperatives. His delegation urged the need for Member States to arrive

at agreed general guidelines that would create an environment favourable to the development of cooperatives. To that end, they should exchange information and experience and encourage an international partnership among cooperatives.

45. Follow-up to the International Year of the Family had not so far been as successful as hoped, owing to a lack of consensus on terminology and basic definitions and the absence of a global plan of action and indicators by which to measure progress. Substantive progress had been hampered by economic difficulties, the employment crisis, limited social investment and lack of access to basic social services. To meet the challenge, the resources of the United Nations Trust Fund on Family Activities should be increased. Senegal had had a family code for several decades and attached high priority to issues of parenting and promoting a partnership between men and women within the family.

46. Senegal was to have the honour of hosting the World Education Forum in April 2000, the culmination point of the Education for All (EFA) 2000 Assessment, which would review the education situation around the globe and devise new initiatives to realize the objectives of the World Declaration adopted at the World Conference on Education for All (Jomtien, Thailand, 1990). Among them, the reduction in levels of illiteracy, particularly among women and young people, should be accorded highest priority. Despite budget constraints, the Government of Senegal had made outstanding efforts in the area of education and training; more than a third of the national budget was allocated to education. The national human resource development programme introduced in 1995 with support from the World Bank had expanded access to elementary education and improved the quality of the education provided. Special emphasis had been placed on reducing inequalities between urban and rural areas, containing education costs and increasing the enrolment of girls. His delegation supported the declaration of a decade for eradicating illiteracy in Africa, including illiteracy among older persons.

47. The principles and recommendations emerging from the World Conference of Ministers Responsible for Youth held in Lisbon and the World Youth Forum held in Braga, Portugal — the right of youth to education and training, to health and employment and to participation in social and political life, and the need to address the problems that most affected them, such as unemployment, illiteracy, poverty, drug use and juvenile delinquency — were at the heart of national youth policy in Senegal. In collaboration and cooperation with the National Youth Council, the Government was in the process of implementing its national youth programme of action and mainstreaming the youth dimension into all development projects and programmes. Moreover, it was sparing no effort to make the fourth session of the World Youth Forum of the United Nations System, to be held in Senegal in the year 2000, an outstanding success. He invited the youth of the world to attend. His delegation would also advocate strengthening the Youth Unit of the United Nations Secretariat and holding a second World Conference of Ministers Responsible for Youth under United Nations auspices.

48. **Ms. Arystanbekova** (Kazakhstan) said that, since the 1995 World Summit for Social Development, the commitments undertaken by the Member States had been transformed into concrete initiatives in the areas of poverty eradication, productive employment and social integration. At the special session of the General Assembly to be held in 2000 to review implementation of the outcome of the Summit, priority should be given to key social issues, such as family, health, safety and poverty. Of equal importance in achieving the Copenhagen objectives was an emphasis on education. The Education for All (EFA) 2000 Assessment should focus on planning future policy initiatives to address the challenges related to early childhood education, primary education, literacy and better living. Her delegation looked forward to the World Education Forum to be held in Senegal in April 2000 as the culmination point of the EFA 2000 Assessment and a means of promoting life-long learning for all people.

49. On the threshold of the next century, young people had a vital role to play in decision-making. In the light of the detailed information contained in the Secretary-General's report on implementation of the World Programme of Action for Youth to the Year 2000 and Beyond (A/54/59), her delegation strongly believed in the importance of joint efforts to draw up new guidelines and strengthen cooperation between Governments and other actors.

50. It was regrettable that the most vulnerable groups — the unemployed, the disabled, the elderly, children and women — suffered most from the recent international economic crisis. The Government of Kazakhstan saw it as one of its main tasks to create a broad and reliable system of social protection aimed at raising the standard of living. It had taken measures to stimulate self-employment by providing credit and organizing workshops on establishing small and medium-size enterprises, in association with United Nations agencies. The President's programme, "Kazakhstan — 2030", identified social harmony, political stability and economic development as the country's key

goals. Her delegation fully supported United Nations efforts to focus more closely on social issues.

51. **Mr. Amorós Núñez** (Cuba) said that his country accorded special importance to the various aspects of social development considered under item 106. In Cuba, equitable distribution of the wealth of society made it possible to meet the basic needs of health, education, employment and cultural development to a degree not often possible in developing countries.

52. The integrated development of youth was an issue of special interest in Cuba. There was no sphere of economic, political or social life in Cuba in which young people did not play a major role. Providing youth with opportunities to participate fully in society was a guiding principle of government policy; youth were well represented, for example, in Parliament and in the executive branch. Cuba had been applying the Programme of Action for Youth to the Year 2000 and Beyond on the national level and collaborating in international efforts.

53. In Cuba, a satisfying old age was considered not only a legitimate aspiration of any human being, but an indicator of development and good health. Like the rest of the population, older persons benefited from universal free medical and hospital care and social security, one of the chief reasons for the increase in life expectancy in Cuba to age 75. Other programmes, specifically designed to provide social services to older adults or the elderly living alone or to promote voluntary associations of older persons, further improved health and social service indicators for the older age group. Among the activities conducted in honour of the International Year of Older Persons, of great interest was the recent event, GERONTOVIDA 99, held in Havana, combining the third Latin American Congress of the International Association of Gerontology and the Ibero-American Meeting of Older Persons.

54. With regard to persons with disabilities, the Government zealously applied policies that included support to organizations of the disabled and initiatives in the areas of health, education, employment, sports and artistic and cultural activities. Special education programmes ensured a school enrolment of 85 per cent of persons with disabilities, and integrated rehabilitation programmes had succeeded in returning thousands of disabled persons to work.

55. The experience of Cuba demonstrated that social development was achievable even when obstacles were placed to major economic development, such as the economic blockade against Cuba promoted by the United States of America. It was to be hoped that the current debate in plenary meeting on the World Summit for Social Development would reaffirm the need to address the increasing poverty and unemployment, deteriorating health, growing malnutrition and declining education levels in many countries. The answers lay in more official development assistance, fulfilment by the developed nations of their aid promises, inclusion of a social dimension in economic adjustment policies and the generation of an international environment favourable to social development.

56. **Mr. De Groot** (Netherlands), speaking as the youth representative selected by the Dutch Youth Council for International Affairs, said that he would like to talk about how the Internet could contribute to social development and youth empowerment. Young people made up half of the on-line community, though they accounted for less than a quarter of the world's population, because they were immersed in a process of learning and personal development. The Internet provided an opportunity for young people to invent and execute new projects, to form a non-governmental organization, for instance, or start up a small enterprise. An example of such a project was the UNderDOG project set up by the Council, which enabled youth to discuss United Nations issues on-line.

57. Despite the opportunities it offered, the Internet had at least two shortcomings that demanded urgent attention. The first involved the degree of access and related to the information gap between the developed and developing countries. The second involved quality of access and related to the difficulty of finding the information desired in the Internet "cybersprawl", which was suggestive of a poorly planned metropolis. Young people themselves bore primary responsibility for addressing the problem of cybersprawl, but it was the duty of local authorities, Governments and the international community to enable young people to realize their potential for change.

58. The Internet should not be developed by market forces alone. The Youth Unit of the United Nations Secretariat, the United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF) and UNESCO should cooperate with youth organizations in taking action. First, young people should be trained, formally and informally, to handle digital information properly. Second, the problem of language should be addressed; most Internet information was in English, and translation initiatives were needed to make it available in other languages. In those efforts, young people should be involved not only as objects but also as subjects of actions that affected them. For example, the World Youth Forum of the United Nations System and its outcome should be taken more seriously. Its proceedings could be improved by a training programme for

non-governmental youth organizations, with the help of the Youth Unit, on using the Internet to maximize their efforts.

59. **Ms. Elisha** (Benin) said that Benin was committed to establishing institutional mechanisms and mobilizing the political will and resources necessary to combat underdevelopment. Special efforts were being made to address the problems of young people, older persons and disabled persons.

60. In African society, those groups had traditionally enjoyed the love and support of families, of which they had been an integral part. As African countries sought to build modern nation States, the economic foundations of the family were being continuously eroded. With agriculture oriented towards meeting the needs of the international market, farmers were unable to generate sufficient income and lacked the time to grow food products for their own consumption. Young people were abandoning their villages and swelling the ranks of the urban poor. The decline of official development assistance had reduced the State's capacity to provide education for young people, too many of whom were forced to enter the labour market prematurely. Poverty and unemployment were preventing many Africans from caring for their families, and only the increase of purchasing power in both urban and rural areas would reverse that situation.

61. In order to address the problems of the most vulnerable groups in society, her Government had established a Ministry for Social Protection and the Family with a service specifically responsible for meeting the needs of older persons, who represented only 7 per cent of the population, reflecting their low life expectancy. Other initiatives included the establishment of care facilities, the provision of assistance to older persons living in poverty, the promotion of solidarity among the generations, the adoption of legislation to protect older persons, the strengthening of their capacity to meet their own needs, and the implementation of measures to combat isolation among the elderly, including the creation of day centres.

62. Since the proclamation of the International Year of Disabled Persons in 1981, a number of steps had been taken to enhance the socio-economic position of disabled persons in Benin, including the establishment of training centres, support for associations of disabled persons, the adoption of legislation, the dissemination of rules on equal opportunities for disabled persons, training for speech therapists, and the signing and ratification of the agreement establishing the African Rehabilitation Institute. Those many valuable initiatives would yield results only in a favourable economic environment, in which sustained growth increased purchasing power, enabling families to care for all their members, young, old or disabled.

63. **Mr. Desai** (Under-Secretary-General for Economic and Social Affairs) said that, during the global economic crisis of the past two years, growth had fallen dramatically, especially in developing countries. The number of countries with negative per capita growth had doubled, while the proportion of the population living in countries so affected had increased sevenfold. A disproportionate share of the cost of the crisis had thus been borne by the poorest countries and the poorest people. The international community must in future address the issues of integration and interdependence with a view to securing not only stability, but also equitable and sustainable economic growth.

64. The quality of growth was also important. The international community had made a commitment to halve the number of people living in absolute poverty, with incomes of less than $1 per day, by 2015. Studies had shown that, with growth rates at their past levels of 3 to 4 per cent, that goal could not be achieved. However, if growth strategies incorporated the concepts of equity and social justice, that goal could be achieved before 2015.

65. Poverty was linked to unemployment. The International Labour Organization (ILO) estimated that at least 140 million persons worldwide were unemployed. Some groups were exceptionally disadvantaged. A large proportion of poor households were headed by women, while young people aged 15 to 24 represented almost half of the unemployed globally. The problem of poverty among older persons was especially alarming, since the proportion of the population aged over 60 was rising sharply. In developed countries, older persons remained active for longer but were unable to find work, while in developing countries they had to work too hard for too long because of the absence of social security. The international community could not address the issue of the growing number of older persons without considering their entitlement to income, employment and social protection. Disabled persons, too, accounted for a disproportionately high number of the unemployed and those living in poverty, especially in developing countries.

66. The plight of those underprivileged minorities must be addressed through a social philosophy promoting inclusiveness, equity and justice. At the national level, the concerns of those groups must be integrated into every area of policy, instead of being addressed in a compartmentalized fashion through special programmes administered by ministries of welfare. In order to remedy unemployment, national growth strategies must emphasize labour-intensive sectors such as agriculture and textiles, while the

international community must ensure that the commitment to eradicate poverty was reflected, *inter alia*, in trade policies that increased access for producers from developing countries to global markets and financial policies that emphasized micro-credit.

67. The Third Committee played a strong role in promoting the themes of gender equality, equity and social justice in the work of the United Nations, and its concerns were very close to those of his Department. He urged it to focus on those themes not as the province of special programmes for special groups, but as priorities that must be central to all development strategies.

68. **Mr. Mofokeng** (South Africa) asked whether the United Nations funds and programmes had tailored their priorities to the needs of the world's 60 million unemployed young people, and whether there were any plans to strengthen the United Nations Youth Unit, which was severely understaffed. He expressed concern that the follow-up to the World Conference of Ministers Responsible for Youth (Lisbon, 1998) was not receiving the same attention within the Secretariat as the implementation of the Copenhagen Declaration and the Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action, and asked whether the Conference had not been disadvantaged in that respect by the decision not to designate it a United Nations conference.

69. **Mr. Desai** (Under-Secretary-General for Economic and Social Affairs) replied that, while his Department recognized that more needed to be done to assist the world's youth and was seeking to raise awareness of that problem, it was not a field-oriented body and lacked the budget to deliver services at the country level. That was the responsibility of such institutions as UNDP and UNICEF. Youth unemployment was a social time bomb that must be defused. ILO was undertaking a number of initiatives to that end, but much remained to be done. As to the Lisbon Conference, the General Assembly had decided on a format that would, in its view, be most conducive to interaction between Governments and youth groups. His Department took the outcome of the Conference very seriously and was working to disseminate it.

70. **Mr. Kalache** (World Health Organization (WHO)) said that the International Year of Older Persons had given WHO the impetus to consolidate its Ageing and Health Programme established in 1995. The Programme's title reflected a shift from earlier compartmentalized initiatives that had focused on the elderly to a new approach emphasizing ageing, rather than old age, and based on the idea that, since life was a continuum, the best way to ensure health in older age was to highlight the ageing dimension throughout the life cycle. The Programme's five key elements, namely health promotion, gender, cultural perspective, community and ethics, reflected the reality that women and men aged differently, the importance of understanding the settings in which individuals aged, the need to find affordable solutions for older persons within their communities, and the ethical dilemmas related to ageing, including such issues as undue prolongation of life or undue hastening of death.

71. The Programme's conceptual framework was based on the idea of functional capacity. The functional capacity of human biological systems reached its peak in early adulthood and declined naturally thereafter. The rate of that decline was largely determined by lifestyle, environment and such deficiencies as poor nutrition. Much could be done to slow the rate of decline, and, for individuals who had reached the threshold of disability, hip replacements, cataract operations and other such interventions could restore function. Where the regaining of functional capacity was no longer possible, maximum quality of life should be ensured within the limitations imposed by the level of disability.

72. Drawing on the Programme, WHO had developed a Global Strategy for Active Ageing consisting of four components, namely gathering and disseminating information on healthy ageing to target groups ranging from policy makers to ageing individuals; raising awareness of population ageing as one of the greatest public health challenges of the twenty-first century; capacity-building, including identifying research needs and training for primary health-care workers; and policy development with particular emphasis on multi-sectoral approaches and cost-effective strategies for developing countries.

73. The work of WHO on ageing and health was carried out in partnership with other United Nations agencies, government agencies, non-governmental organizations and academic institutions. The 1999 World Health Day had been dedicated to the theme of healthy ageing. On 2 October 1999, WHO had launched the Global Movement for Active Ageing by organizing the Global Embrace, a series of walk events in which millions of people in over 3,000 cities and towns in 97 countries had participated over a 24-hour period. The Global Embrace had been the largest-ever simultaneous health-promotion event in the world. The momentum generated by the WHO initiatives to celebrate the International Year of Older Persons would be consolidated through, *inter alia*, the establishment of a programme for research on ageing and health and an initiative to expand programmes to train health professionals in caring for older persons.

74. Efforts to promote active ageing must be complemented by policies to reduce social inequities and poverty, and should be integrated into all development programmes. The maintenance of health and quality of life for all ages would help to build a harmonious intergenerational community and a dynamic economy. Healthy older persons were a resource to their families, their communities and their societies as a whole.

75. **Mr. Doryan** (World Bank) said that the widespread visibility of recent economic reversals and social setbacks had highlighted the human costs of financial crises in emerging markets and had shown that the global community had not fully understood the meaning and measure of development. It had become clear that separating macroeconomic policy-making from human development was a recipe for failure. Women and girls were particularly vulnerable to the effects of financial crises, since they often bore the burden of food and medical shortages by putting their families' needs before their own, and were the first to lose jobs and educational opportunities. One of the most disruptive aspects of the financial crises had been the unravelling of the promise of a better future for young people and their families. The crises had strained the capacity of the affected Governments to prevent basic social services from collapsing and had illustrated the importance of effective governance in key social areas and public confidence in government officials.

76. The World Bank had conducted a series of studies entitled "Consultations with the Poor", involving approximately 20,000 poor men and women in 23 countries. Five main dimensions of concern to poor people had emerged from those studies: material well-being, physical well-being, security, freedom of choice and action, and good social relations. The concept of well-being included the ability to acquire education, information, services and resources, to enjoy a decent standard of living, to avoid slipping further into poverty and even to help others in need.

77. The Bank sought to address the problems of human and social development through various approaches, such as the creation of "coalitions for change" involving cooperation among the United Nations, Governments, multilateral organizations, the private sector and civil society. It had launched a new poverty strategy under which a poverty reduction strategy paper interlinking macroeconomic and social issues would be prepared for each country to guide the efforts of the Bank, the International Monetary Fund (IMF) and the Government concerned. The Bank had deepened and broadened its commitment to debt reduction through a revitalized Heavily Indebted Poor Countries (HIPC) Debt Initiative. Recently, it had produced a paper on managing the social dimensions of crisis, in which it had pointed out the need to minimize the impact of crises on the poor. On the basis of that paper, a new work programme would be developed to identify good practices in that area. The Bank was strongly committed to investing in human development, which was the foundation for long-term economic growth and poverty reduction. Accordingly, it had earmarked over $7 billion for lending in the areas of social protection, health, nutrition and education.

78. The Bank's broad social agenda was basic to its overall mission of poverty reduction. The Bank and similar institutions must bear in mind their accountability to those living in poverty and exclusion, particularly in view of the forthcoming five-year review of the World Summit for Social Development. It was time for the global community to listen carefully to the voices of the poor and respond with renewed commitment, deeper understanding and more effective partnerships.

79. **Ms. Olszowska** (United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO)) said that the Education for All (EFA) 2000 Assessment exercise, described in document A/54/128, would provide an opportunity for each country to take stock of its progress and shortfalls, consult with neighbouring countries and donors and reshape its educational strategies at the threshold of the new millennium. Greater emphasis was currently being placed on the presentation of disaggregated data to facilitate in-country and regional educational planning. A list of 18 core EFA indicators and other, more qualitative means of reviewing EFA progress had been developed. Undoubtedly, there would be a huge demand for international agencies to assist countries in collecting, processing and interpreting quantitative data. It was important to stress that each indicator must be interpreted in relation to others, rather than in isolated fashion. The EFA 2000 Assessment would also involve reporting on the status of implementation of Commitment 6 of the Programme of Action of the World Summit for Social Development, in terms of universal and equitable access to quality education.

80. Although some 3.3 billion people had become literate in the past four decades, progress had been uneven and there were still some 875 million illiterate people in the world, two thirds of whom were women; the illiteracy gap between men and women had not narrowed. Consequently, a 10-year programme on girls' education, based on the premise that national partners must take the lead, was about to be submitted to the Secretary-General. The proposed United Nations decade to eradicate illiteracy was aimed at creating a literate world in which societies and individuals promoted

their own literacy projects. UNESCO would welcome the adoption of a General Assembly resolution on the subject.

81. Before the end of 1999, UNESCO would organize an international meeting on youth and older persons, in the framework of the International Year of Older Persons. The Lisbon Declaration on Youth Policies and Programmes and the Braga Youth Action Plan had inspired the UNESCO strategy for action with and for youth. The next conference of ministers responsible for youth affairs should be held at the same time as the next non-governmental organizations' forum in order to enhance the dialogue among youth, the United Nations system and decision-makers. She hoped that Member States would make efforts in that direction.

The meeting rose at 12.30 p.m.

United Nations A/C.3/54/SR.4

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Chairman: Mr. Galuška ..... (Czech Republic)

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Agenda item 106: Social development, including questions relating to the world social situation and to youth, ageing, disabled persons and the family (*continued*)

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99-81460 (E)

The meeting was called to order at 10.10 a.m.

Agenda item 106: Social development, including questions relating to the world social situation and to youth, ageing, disabled persons and the family (*continued*) (A/54/3, A/54/56, A/54/57, A/54/59, A/54/61 and Corr.1, A/54/62, A/54/66-E/1999/6, A/54/98, A/54/128-E/1999/70, A/54/256, A/54/268 and A/54/388; A/C.3/54/L.2)

1. **Ms. Monroy** (Mexico), speaking on behalf of the Rio Group, said that, in line with the Copenhagen Declaration and the Programme of Action of the World Summit for Social Development, the countries of the Rio Group had launched economic and social programmes designed to create favourable conditions for incorporating vulnerable population groups into the development process and to eliminate structural imbalances, particularly poverty and marginalization. In so doing, they emphasized the importance of education as a basic means of overcoming poverty and promoting integrated human development. As a result of their educational policies, those countries had achieved nearly universal coverage in the area of basic education. It was encouraging to note that the number of girls enrolled at the various levels of education was equal to, and in some cases greater than, the number of boys enrolled.

2. Efforts in the field of education currently focused on problems such as drop-out and repetition rates. Priority was given to working with families, such as by offering incentives to persuade parents not to remove their children from school in order to send them to work. School feeding programmes in several countries of the region had proved to be an effective means of keeping children in school and improving their performance. Efforts were also being made to improve school curricula, provide teachers with better training and higher pay and ensure that a higher proportion of students entered technical and higher education.

3. Owing to the high proportion of young people in the populations of the countries of the Rio Group, the implementation of the World Programme of Action for Youth was particularly important. However, those countries were also fully aware of their responsibility for addressing the issue of population ageing, and were committed to the creation of a society for all ages.

4. Speaking as the representative of Mexico, she said that her Government was investing more than ever before in programmes on health and nutrition, education and training, social security and basic services. The Food, Health and Education Programme (PROGRESA) targeted poor families, particularly indigenous families in rural communities, and support was provided for projects to generate employment and income. A citizens' advisory council on social development had been established to promote collaboration and dialogue between the authorities and civil society, with a view to the formulation of policies through an integrated approach. She recalled that the Fifth World Assembly of Disabled People's International had been held in Mexico City in December 1998 and that the declaration adopted at that meeting had set goals for future work.

5. Because young people made up a large proportion of Mexico's population, the country's national development plan for 1995 to 2000 had emphasized efforts to help young people become self-sufficient. The Government had re-established the Mexican Youth Institute to coordinate programmes and actions. The Institute, in collaboration with the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO), would organize a world summit on youth for a culture of peace at the threshold of the new millennium.

6. **Mrs. Gittens-Joseph** (Trinidad and Tobago), speaking on behalf of the Caribbean Community (CARICOM) member States that were Members of the United Nations, said that the participants in a recent regional meeting held in preparation for the Millennium Assembly had asserted that the twenty-first century must be the people's century. The world economy and globalization must be humanized, and microeconomic policies must be formulated with a view to improving the lives of ordinary people. The success of globalization must be judged by whether it benefited rich and poor alike while ensuring social justice and equity. National and international development policies must pay more attention to social issues. External debt, structural adjustment programmes, trade imbalances, financial crises, natural disasters and wars had all impeded social development.

7. Issues relating to youth were particularly important in view of the profound economic, political, social, cultural and environmental changes of the current era. CARICOM supported the Secretary-General's recommendation that the United Nations Youth Fund should be strengthened and focused on capacity-building for the implementation of the World Programme of Action for Youth. It also agreed that the Youth Unit of the United Nations Secretariat should be strengthened. The Caribbean countries' efforts to empower young people through meaningful participation were exemplified by the Caribbean Youth Summit held in October 1998 to prepare for the twenty-first special session of the General Assembly. Youth forums and workshops were also

held to involve young people in addressing the issues that affected them, and projects were under way in marginalized communities to facilitate young people's social integration and reduce deviant behaviour.

8. The preparation of the entire population for the later stages of life should be an integral part of social policies. The statements made recently in the plenary Assembly on the follow-up to the International Year of Older Persons should stimulate further action. In the 2002 review of the outcome of the World Assembly on Ageing, more attention should be paid to the impact of technology on the aged, women and ageing and the relevance of services such as banking and health insurance to the needs of the aged. Development policies should reflect the view that the aged were a valuable social and economic resource. At the forthcoming meeting of the CARICOM Council for Human and Social Development, a Caribbean Charter for Health and Ageing would be adopted.

9. CARICOM member States were making every effort to implement the World Programme of Action concerning Disabled Persons. Assistance from relevant United Nations agencies would help to expedite the implementation of those countries' national policies on the disabled. Many CARICOM members provided a disability assistance grant, and some exempted the disabled from the payment of customs duty and value-added tax on health-care equipment. Many Caribbean non-governmental organizations provided training for disabled persons to equip them with marketable skills, and some of those organizations received financial support from Governments and international agencies. Some of the CARICOM countries had taken steps to ratify International Labour Organization (ILO) Convention No. 159 on the employment of disabled persons.

10. The importance of families as engines of economic and social development must be reflected in national development strategies and plans. CARICOM welcomed the Organization's intention to hold an Expert Group Meeting on the Development of a Framework on Family Policies. In the Caribbean, the pressures of unemployment, poverty, substance abuse, overcrowding and the rise in teenage pregnancy had led to a higher incidence of divorce, domestic violence and child neglect and abandonment. Some CARICOM countries had passed legislation and established government entities to address the social tragedy of domestic violence. Support services for victims and extensive public awareness programmes had been launched. Health and family-life education had been promoted at all levels of the educational system. Efforts were being made to promote equal partnership between men and women in family life; some countries had introduced legislation for that purpose. Many CARICOM countries had established national machinery to identify issues affecting the family and to provide appropriate support.

11. She welcomed the report of the Secretary-General on the status and role of cooperatives in the light of new economic and social trends (A/54/57). Cooperatives were an important means of enabling citizens to play a significant role in overcoming poverty, securing productive employment and encouraging social integration. They reflected the values of cooperation and mutual assistance that were rooted in Caribbean culture, and had made a major contribution to national development in the Caribbean. Some countries had a national policy for cooperative development aimed at enabling that sector to contribute to job creation and business development, especially among young people.

12. **Mr. Yusoff** (Malaysia) said that his Government had formulated an integrated national youth policy, which it had reviewed in 1997 to emphasize the acquisition of knowledge, the development of skills and entrepreneurship, healthy lifestyles, character-building, social interaction, the development of smart partnership and international networking. The aim was to create a generation of young people who were well educated, united, democratic, tolerant, competitive, ethical and scientifically and technologically progressive. Malaysia's youth programmes were fully integrated into other social development programmes.

13. In view of the need to enhance opportunities in all fields for people with disabilities and to remove all social, physical and economic barriers to their full participation in society, his Government provided education, training and rehabilitation programmes to disabled persons. Twenty-six special schools met the needs of children with disabilities and learning difficulties. Malaysia welcomed the work of non-governmental organizations in providing social services to the disabled. In the future, more community-based rehabilitation schemes would be set up to help families care for the disabled and to facilitate their integration into society. Accessibility would continue to be improved and training programmes would continue to be implemented to ensure better employment opportunities for the disabled.

14. Programmes for older persons should take into account the need to provide the latter with greater financial and personal independence and to develop a relationship of mutual reliance rather than dependency. Malaysia promoted the concept of a caring society; accordingly, families would continue to be primarily responsible for caring for older persons. The Government would assist them by providing tax relief for the medical expenses of older persons and by

modifying housing designs to accommodate extended families.

15. The family played a key role in instilling the moral and ethical values that produced good and responsible citizens. The new risks and pressures created by technological advances and demographic and socio-economic changes must be addressed in an effective and timely manner. In general, the successful implementation of social development programmes depended on effective cooperation and coordination among all the actors involved, including the international community.

16. **Mr. Gautam** (Nepal) said it was disheartening that, four years after the World Summit for Social Development, its goals — poverty eradication, full employment and social integration — were still far from being achieved. Poverty eradication was the main gateway to social development, especially in developing countries. Achieving that goal would require political will, national action and international cooperation at all levels. The special session of the General Assembly in 2000 should focus on poverty eradication as its top priority.

17. His Government had developed specific policies and programmes on social protection. They involved mobilizing local resources, strengthening and developing social-welfare centres, especially for victims of drug addiction and natural disasters, and fostering public awareness of the need for social protection of women. His Government acknowledged the important role of non-governmental organizations and civil society in social development.

18. His delegation welcomed the report of the Secretary-General on the implementation of the World Programme of Action for Youth to the Year 2000 and Beyond (A/54/59). In view of the important role of youth in nation-building, his Government placed a high priority on mobilizing young people to participate in the social and economic development of the country.

19. His delegation further welcomed the report of the Secretary-General on the International Year of Older Persons (A/54/268). Modern democratic societies should provide economic and social protection to senior citizens.

20. The activities of the United Nations system aimed at meeting the basic needs of disabled persons should be supported. His Government had adopted substantial measures to protect the rights of the elderly and disabled and provide them with essential services.

21. **Ms. Shanter** (Sudan) said that social development could not be separated from economic development and could only take place in a climate of peace and stability. The Government of the Sudan was still endeavouring to bring peace to the south of the country, as evidenced by its positive response to calls for a ceasefire from the Security Council, the Intergovernmental Authority on Development and the European Union. In August 1999 it had declared a comprehensive ceasefire and announced its readiness for a permanent ceasefire and separation of forces in order to facilitate the flow of humanitarian aid. The rebel movement, however, continued to reject the calls made, thus prolonging the war and the suffering of civilians.

22. Youth was the driving force of the development process, and the Government had therefore established a comprehensive national strategy for youth and had presented its youth policies at the 1998 Lisbon World Conference of Ministers Responsible for Youth. Given the importance of education in raising the level of awareness and maturity among young people, the Government had expanded opportunities for higher education and had, over the past five years, established a university in each of the country's 26 constituent states. It had also endeavoured to promote and implement the principle of "education for all" and had continued its efforts to eliminate adult illiteracy in remote areas.

23. The Sudan was endeavouring to achieve the complete integration of disabled persons in society and, prompted by the General Assembly's proclamation of 1981 as the International Year of Disabled Persons, it had enacted a law on the welfare and rehabilitation of disabled persons in 1984 and had established a national council for the handicapped.

24. International conferences had recommended concern for family rights and the integration of the family in all activities for sustainable development. The Sudan felt it was necessary to protect the family as an important social institution from the many social ills arising from the endeavour of some contemporary societies to restrict the role of the family and alter its significance.

25. In the Sudan, the family occupied pride of place in the social structure. The State had therefore adopted a policy of facilitating marriage as providing the natural milieu for the establishment of families, had enacted laws to regulate family rights and the rights of family members and had accorded special attention to rural and migrant families. It had recently established a project for families engaged in production in order to enable them to achieve economic stability by equipping them with the means to produce. Vulnerable families had also benefited from State action in establishing a council for the welfare of orphans and widows. The Sudan had also established national projects to provide clothing and shelter to families that had been

subjected to the attacks of the rebel army in the south of the country.

26. On the threshold of the new millennium, it was a source for pessimism that the developing countries were still required to struggle ceaselessly for the elimination of poverty. In a world in which the developing countries were facing the challenges of globalization, chronic problems still presented a stumbling block to their efforts to establish genuine concepts of social development. Those problems included indebtedness, the impact of restructuring programmes, the paucity of financial resources, the interruption in the flow of official development assistance from donor countries and the marginalization of the developing countries in the market economy.

27. The time was approaching for the year 2000 review of the 1995 Copenhagen Declaration on Social Development and the Programme of Action of the World Summit for Social Development. Five years after the commitments given at the Social Summit, the poorer countries were still experiencing an increased incidence of diseases, particularly HIV/AIDS, poor educational and basic health services, higher rates of unemployment, the emigration of educated personnel to the richer countries and continuing wars and conflicts.

28. The international community, and the wealthy donor countries in particular, must discharge their obligations to the developing countries. The time had come to create an appropriate climate in which all human beings could enjoy a life of dignity. It was shameful that, in Africa, children should continue to die of hunger, disease and homelessness caused by poverty and war while their counterparts in the rich countries of the North enjoyed all the social services required to produce a future generation of nation-builders. Should that situation continue, the gap between North and South would only widen further. The Copenhagen commitments must be implemented, the principle of partnership between States must be given effect and the efforts of non-governmental organizations and the international community must be coordinated in order to achieve the goals approved by all at the 1995 Summit.

29. There was international awareness that social conditions in the world had deteriorated, it was acknowledged that social development could not be separated from economic development and from a climate of stability and peace, and globalization had become a reality. All of those challenges must be met. While global approaches were to be welcomed, it was also important to respect the particular character of specific societies so that tolerance could be the basis for interaction between societies. One world order and uniform standards that were applied to all societies without regard for the culture, customs, traditions and heritage of each could never promote social development.

30. **Archbishop Martino** (Observer for the Holy See) said that, in an age when technology made the world seem smaller and individuals tended to be isolated from one another, the restoration of the family was the surest remedy for many social ills.

31. Words alone would not suffice to preserve the sacredness of the institution of the family; action was needed. First and foremost was the principle that the family was based on the marriage of a man and a woman. There must also be an awareness that every human life was a precious gift, that pregnancy was not a disease, that children were a blessing, that persons with disabilities deserved special care and consideration and that older persons were worthy of veneration and esteem.

32. Parents had a special responsibility to care for and educate their children. At the World Conference of Ministers Responsible for Youth, held at Lisbon in 1998, his delegation had stressed that there must be an inseparable link between policies to benefit youth and policies to benefit the family. In a strong family, parents transmitted to their children the fundamental values that led to their becoming virtuous men and women, helping to shape a peaceful and prosperous world.

33. Not all families were in the same situation. Families that had to care for persons with disabilities appeared to face exceptional and trying circumstances. In reality, however, such situations could bring a family closer together. Under no circumstances should persons with disabilities be considered any less human or less worthy of life. Proper assistance must be given to families who cared for disabled loved ones.

34. As the end of the International Year of Older Persons approached, his delegation wished to stress the theme of intergenerational solidarity. While democratic and commercial societies obviously placed a high premium on youth, humanity itself was humiliated when the wisdom of elders was ignored. Through appropriate policies, States should ensure that respected and venerable elders were able to participate in the life of a society.

35. **Mr. Krokhmal** (Ukraine) said that his country, like many other countries with economies in transition, was undergoing a profound transformation. In seeking to overcome the difficulties inherent in economic reforms, his Government viewed the establishment of an effective social-

protection system as a major task. It had established a comprehensive social programme to overcome the negative impact of the economic crisis. Despite the lack of funds, all possible measures were being taken to avoid cutting social expenditure. A reform of the social-insurance system was under way. Plans had been made to reform the pension system by setting up a scale of payments based on the contribution made by each member of society.

36. The proportion of youth in the population had grown steadily in recent years and now accounted for over 20 per cent, or 10 million people. His Government attached great importance to the implementation of the World Programme of Action for Youth to the Year 2000 and Beyond. National legislation had been enacted to respond to the needs of young people. In the past two years, the State Committee for Family and Youth Affairs, in conjunction with youth non-governmental organizations, had implemented over 200 programmes to improve the status of youth.

37. In the wake of the Chernobyl disaster, his Government had made every effort to improve the situation of the disabled. Special legislation had been enacted to ensure equality and non-discrimination and to enable disabled persons to participate fully in the life of the country. His Government's strategy was based on the United Nations Standard Rules for Equalization of Opportunities for Persons with Disabilities. They had been incorporated into the relevant government programmes, including programmes to promote the development of the orthopaedic industry and to provide disabled persons with mechanical and motorized devices. Non-governmental organizations also made an important contribution to the rehabilitation and active participation of disabled persons.

38. **Mr. Jayanama** (Thailand) said that his Government gave high priority to promoting social development at home and fostering effective international cooperation in that area. Thailand had adopted a people-centred approach to development. The Eighth National Plan for Social and Economic Development reflected the emphasis in the Copenhagen Declaration on the human being as the centre of all development activities and as their prime beneficiary. His Government was working in partnership with the private sector and civil society to ensure that economic growth proceeded hand in hand with the development of society as a whole, so that no one was excluded from the development process. Special attention was given to vulnerable groups, including women, children, the elderly and the disabled. While its close-knit families and strong agricultural base had enabled Thailand to weather the 1997 financial crisis, the existing social safety nets had been severely tested and the crisis had served as a reminder that social development could not be treated as secondary to economic development.

39. Education was a great equalizer and it should therefore be a cause for concern that some 875 million people worldwide remained illiterate. The international community must work towards ensuring equal access to education for all. Thailand, for its part, had hosted the World Conference on Education for All (Jomtien, 1990). The World Declaration on Education for All and Framework for Action to Meet Basic Learning Needs adopted at the Conference had focused on early childhood care and development; access to and completion of primary education; the significant reduction of levels of illiteracy; improved learning achievement; the provision of basic non-formal education and skills training for youth and adults; and acquisition by families and individuals of the knowledge, skills and attitudes needed to enhance quality of life. Thailand strongly supported the proposed launching of a United Nations decade to eradicate illiteracy, beginning in the year 2000, and looked forward to the holding of the World Education Forum in Senegal in April 2000.

40. While education for all was a long-term goal, the immediate priority must be human resources development. Accordingly, at the July ministerial meeting of the Association of South-East Asian Nations (ASEAN) held in Singapore, Thailand had proposed the establishment of an ASEAN human resources development centre and a human resources development fund with a view to strengthening the capacity of men and women in the ASEAN region to meet effectively the challenges of globalization. Thailand would work actively with its ASEAN partners towards the realization of the centre and the fund, but it was also counting on the support and cooperation of the international community and international organizations, including the United Nations bodies concerned. Education and human resources development must provide not only the ability to earn a livelihood, but also the ability to think and care about others, and they should therefore promote respect for human rights and good governance, which were inalienable elements of social development.

41. The special session of the General Assembly devoted to the follow-up to the World Summit for Social Development to be held in Geneva in June 2000 would provide an opportunity to reflect on what had been achieved, and what remained to be done. Since ideology and determination alone could not secure social development in developing countries, there must be an effort during the special session to strengthen international partnerships with a view to mobilizing the necessary financial assistance, technical know-how and human resources.

42. **Mrs. Brobbey** (Ghana) said that, despite initiatives at the national, regional and international levels, the goals of the World Summit for Social Development (Copenhagen, 1995) were far from being attained. Indeed, the disparity between rich and poor nations continued to widen, and much of the world's population was afflicted by poverty, malnutrition, unemployment and social exclusion. While social development was the responsibility of Governments, her delegation believed that, without the creation of an international enabling environment, developing countries could hardly achieve the goals of the Copenhagen Summit. In many of those countries, structural adjustment policies were exacerbating poverty among their populations. Despite the growing recognition of the need to integrate the social and economic dimensions of policy, attention remained focused in practice on economic parameters. Priority must be given to health promotion, job creation, basic education and social protection, in particular for vulnerable groups.

43. Her delegation commended the adoption of the Lisbon Declaration on Youth Policies and Programmes, and the Braga Youth Action Plan, which were aimed at addressing the problems of young people and making them partners in development. Those instruments were important tools for the social integration of young people, and it was therefore imperative that Governments should make a commitment to implementing their provisions with the participation of youth organizations from their respective countries. In Ghana, where young people were considered the most important and productive segment of the population, special emphasis was placed on providing quality education and professional training to prepare them to play an active role in society.

44. The proclamation of 1999 as the International Year of Older Persons was an opportunity to highlight the talents, wealth of knowledge and experience of older persons and increase awareness of their problems and the fast rate at which society was ageing. In developing countries, traditional family support for older persons was diminishing because of economic hardship. It was to be hoped that the activities of the Year would draw attention to the problem of the migration of young people from rural areas and its effect on the aged in the third world.

45. Disabled persons, like the aged, were a vulnerable group. Her Government's efforts to expand its services to disabled persons, which included schools and training centres to equip them with the requisite skills for employment and integration in society, were hampered by budgetary constraints. Other developing countries were facing similar problems, and she therefore called for international cooperation to address the needs of disabled persons, as well as the elderly, in the developing world.

46. In Ghana, the family was cherished and protected as the natural and fundamental unit of society. In keeping with that belief, Ghanaian legislation on inheritance, the rights of spouses, and the formation and dissolution of families had been revised. Her delegation appreciated the tireless efforts of the United Nations system as well as non-governmental organizations to raise awareness of family issues and to support Governments in the formulation of family policies. It was concerned, however, at the decline in contributions to the United Nations Trust Fund on Family Activities. Member States must increase their contributions to the Fund if the objectives of the International Year of the Family were to be achieved.

47. **Mr. Bilman** (Turkey) noted that progress had been made towards eradicating poverty, eliminating inequalities, improving the quality of life for all, including disabled persons and the elderly, and promoting family values, but much remained to be done. However, given the importance attached to those goals by individual countries and the international community, there was cause to be optimistic regarding the future of the world's social situation.

48. Social development had ranked high among the priorities of successive Turkish Governments. Legislation had been reformed and measures introduced to combat poverty and unemployment; participation in policy-making had been broadened; the social-security system was being reformed, with a view to making it less burdensome on the economy; and an unemployment insurance scheme was in the pipeline.

49. Turkey had the youngest population in Europe. His Government recognized that, while Turkey's young people were an asset, significant attention and resources were required to meet their needs. Over the years, Turkey had drawn on United Nations themes and guidelines in developing national programmes for youth, and had wholeheartedly supported such international initiatives as the World Programme of Action for Youth to the Year 2000 and Beyond. It was in that spirit that Turkey, which had been an active participant in the World Conference of Ministers Responsible for Youth (Lisbon, 1998), had offered to host the second World Conference, as well as the World Youth Forum and World Youth Festival, in Istanbul in 2002. That offer had been noted with appreciation at the February session of the Commission for Social Development.

50. **Mr. Hadjiargyrou** (Cyprus) said that since 1996 the primary vehicle for promoting issues related to older persons in Cyprus had been the Coordinating Agency for Older Persons, composed of governmental and non-governmental representatives and chaired by the Minister of Labour and

Social Insurance. The proposals of the Agency were usually adopted as official policy by the Government. In celebration of the International Year of Older Persons, the Agency had organized a number of events; the Ministry of Education and Culture had launched an art and essay-writing competition in the primary and secondary schools; and the University of Cyprus had done an in-depth study of older persons in Cyprus. Other commemorative events included a television documentary and a photographic competition.

51. The main features of the Government's policy concerning persons with disabilities were to safeguard equal rights and provide equal opportunities; promote full and equal participation by disabled persons in the social and economic life of the country, deinstitutionalize disabled persons and promote independent living; and provide financial assistance to organizations of the disabled. Services were provided in medical rehabilitation; education; training and retraining; vocational assessment and guidance; placement in employment in the open market, sheltered employment, self-employment and supported employment; provision of technical aids; removal of social and physical barriers; provision of allowances; and financial assistance to disabled persons for purchasing their own homes. Laws had been amended to allow for the free and safe movement of persons with disabilities on public roads and sidewalks and in public buildings, hotels and restaurants. New laws had been drafted against discrimination in employment and education. Removal of social barriers was being pursued through activities aimed at raising public awareness. Persons with disabilities participated in committees and boards that dealt with their concerns at the national and local levels, including the Rehabilitation Council of the Ministry of Labour and Social Insurance, the central body for discussion of all issues concerning disabled persons.

52. Over the past decade and a half, there had been gradual devolution of responsibility for youth issues from government bodies to non-governmental organizations, culminating in the creation of the Youth Board, an umbrella organization. The Government's policy, implemented in close collaboration with the Youth Board, was to provide young people with equal opportunities and treatment, while promoting their personal and social development. The specific objectives were to encourage young people to participate in the affairs of the country; to guarantee young people education and training for integration into economic life; to help young couples acquire their own homes; to help young people to set up their own businesses; to run youth clubs, mainly in rural areas; to set up a youth information centre; and to promote youth-exchange programmes. The Youth Board could submit proposals to the Government on youth policy and initiate new programmes not covered by other departments. The Board was also responsible for liaison with international organizations on international cooperation programmes, such as the Council of Europe's campaign against racism, xenophobia, anti-Semitism and intolerance and the European Union's programme, Youth for Europe III. The Youth Board provided funding for youth exchange programmes and participation of young people in international seminars and other projects of national youth organizations.

53. **Mr. Nikiforov** (Russian Federation) said that his delegation agreed that the fundamental responsibility for addressing social-development issues lay with States. His Government was making a concerted effort to mitigate the effects of the difficult economic situation in which the Russian Federation found itself. It was establishing mechanisms to protect the incomes of public-sector workers and providing social assistance to vulnerable groups. It was also implementing measures to reduce the disparity in the living standards of the various categories of the population, enhance protection of employment and social rights, target social assistance more effectively, and achieve financial and social stability. It had taken into account in its social programmes the main points that had emerged from the World Summit for Social Development (Copenhagen, 1995).

54. International cooperation was needed to supplement efforts at the national level in order to address social problems. Much had been achieved under United Nations auspices. The Russian Federation welcomed the outcome of the thirty-seventh session of the Commission for Social Development, in particular the Agreed Conclusions on Social Services for All adopted by the Commission. The special session of the General Assembly in June 2000 for the overall review and appraisal of the implementation of the outcome of the World Summit for Social Development should give fresh impetus to the elaboration of strategies and programmes aimed at enhancing the position of socially vulnerable groups, including young people, older persons and the disabled. The Russian Federation had supported the idea of holding the special session from the very outset and had actively participated in the work of the Preparatory Committee.

55. His delegation welcomed the proclamation of 1999 as the International Year of Older Persons, and the efforts to implement the United Nations Standard Rules on the Equalization of Opportunities for Persons with Disabilities. The Commonwealth of Independent States had established an organizing committee to coordinate activities to mark the Year within the Commonwealth, while his Government had set up a national preparatory committee for the Year.

56. The Russian Federation was convinced that more could be done to implement the outcome of the Copenhagen Summit. The bodies of the United Nations system should play a stronger role in coordinating efforts to that end. The Commission for Social Development should work more actively alongside interested countries, and its participation in monitoring the implementation of decisions adopted previously in the context of the follow-up to the Summit should be increased.

57. The Russian Federation supported the efforts to strengthen the leading role of the United Nations in the social aspects of international cooperation. It believed that such cooperation should be given high priority within the Organization, and that the interests of the various groups of States, including countries with economies in transition, must be taken into account. It was hopeful that the special session in June 2000 would contribute to the attainment of those goals.

58. **Ms. Otiti** (Uganda) said that progress in social development must include reduced poverty, greater choices and opportunities, better quality of life and better health, yet a large portion of the world's population had remained untouched by those changes. The gap between rich and poor had widened, and as a result institutions, including the family, had been weakened. The prospects for young people were for the most part bleak. Many feared to grow up, because abject poverty would become their problem to solve. The scourge of diseases like HIV/AIDS had robbed many young people of hope for a life of any kind. Some lived a modest life overshadowed by the great achievements of their forebears, which the conditions of their lives offered them no opportunity to emulate. Some youth were merely looking forward to adulthood so that they could spend what they had inherited. Only a few would be fortunate enough to grow up to enjoy the fruits of their own efforts.

59. Although Uganda was one of the world's poorest nations, it was nonetheless addressing children's needs. The Poverty Action Fund had doubled the number of children attending primary school. Approximately 90 per cent of the children of Uganda were now able to complete primary education. Uganda wished to express its gratitude to the United States of America, the United Kingdom, non-governmental organizations and the United Nations for helping to make that goal a reality.

60. Uganda had recognized that the disabled were a very important part of society and had reserved two seats in Parliament specifically for the disabled. It was encouraging that the world was beginning to acknowledge that not only the disabled but also older persons were an asset to society.

61. **Mr. Aleman** (Ecuador) said that he had the honour to introduce two youth representatives from his national delegation.

62. **Ms. Murgueitio** (Ecuador) urged all Member States to allow their young people to contribute to the development of their countries and to hear their ideas and requests: the right to participate in legislative debates, the implementation of national youth policies, the establishment of agencies to guarantee their rights, the creation of youth social-investment funds and of institutions working for and with young people. Youth had both the right to participate and the duty to help build a more just society.

63. **Ms. Vicuña** (Ecuador) said that, when invited to speak before the United Nations, she had imagined that she would find far more young people at the meetings raising issues and debating the requirements of world integration; their absence made it clear how far there was yet to go. A step along that road had been taken at the World Conference of Ministers Responsible for Youth, where the participants had committed themselves to implementing the World Programme of Action for Youth and to creating networks that would foster the establishment of permanent mechanisms for youth participation. The youth of Ecuador worked actively through local, regional and national forums, convinced that by their joint efforts they could find a way to transform their society. Through their representation today at the United Nations, their dreams were beginning to become reality. They would like to see the sub-item of youth under social development become an item in its own right on the agenda of the Third Committee.

64. **Mr. Al-Humaimidi** (Iraq) said that it was difficult to speak of social development in isolation from economic development, which were two sides of the same coin. International instruments had affirmed the right to development as a basic and inalienable human right, and development had become the dominant preoccupation of the developing countries in a world characterized by globalization and marked by its adverse effects.

65. In Iraq, a developing country, there were other challenges to be faced arising out of the devastating consequences of the economic embargo that had now been maintained against the country for more than nine years. The scale of the damage done to the country's social development could be gauged from the situation in the areas of health and education.

66. According to the World Health Organization (WHO), before 1991 some 97 per cent of urban residents and 78 per cent of rural residents had had access to health care. The health-care system had had an extensive network of health

facilities linked by reliable communications and a large fleet of vehicles and ambulances. The calculations of the United Nations Secretariat showed that, after the imposition of the embargo and the aggression against Iraq, infant mortality had risen from 64 per 1,000 live births in 1990 to 129 per 1,000 in 1995 and the incidence of low birth weight had risen from 4 per cent in 1990 to about 25 per cent in 1997. The capacity of health-care facilities to provide services had also deteriorated and the communications network had collapsed. Infectious diseases that had previously been brought under control had reappeared and had become endemic.

67. UNICEF had reported that the Government of Iraq had made large-scale investments in the education sector between the mid-1970s and 1990. UNESCO had stated that it had been part of Iraq's educational policy to provide grants, facilities for research and medical care for students. In 1989 enrolment in elementary and secondary schools had been 75 per cent, or a little more than the average for developing countries. School enrolment for all ages had fallen to 53 per cent, and in the central and southern governorates 80 per cent of school buildings were in need of repair; progress in the elimination of illiteracy had been halted. According to UNESCO figures, the number of absentees from elementary schools had risen from some 96,000 in 1990 to over 130,000 in 1999.

68. The report of the second panel concerning the current humanitarian situation in Iraq (S/1999/356, annex II), had referred to the qualitative dimension of the impact of the sanctions and to the cumulative effects of sustained deprivation on the psychosocial cohesion of the Iraqi population as indicated by an increase in juvenile delinquency, begging and prostitution, anxiety about the future and lack of motivation, and a rising sense of isolation. WHO had pointed out that the number of mental-health patients attending health facilities had risen by 157 per cent between 1990 and 1998. The report had also stated that the cumulative effect of the sanctions regime and of economic decline on the social fabric of Iraq had been particularly evident to the first-hand observers who had communicated with the panel. According to the Humanitarian Coordinator in Iraq, unemployment and low salaries were forcing Iraqis with higher levels of education to abandon jobs as teachers or doctors and either to emigrate or to seek employment as taxi drivers or security guards and the like, thus adding to the problems in the areas of health and education.

69. Development could not take place without the presence of two basic elements, namely financial resources and international cooperation. Iraq had been deprived of both by the imposition and maintenance of the embargo and the ongoing military aggression against it. The strong desire of Iraq's leadership and of its people to advance development as an option to which there was no alternative had nevertheless prompted the country to use the scarce resources available to it for the basic requirements of development and to channel them in such a way as to mitigate the consequences of the embargo.

70. The international community must be faithful to the commitments it had made at the Copenhagen World Summit for Social Development. It must remove the sanctions that one country was placing in the way of development in Iraq, a country whose Secretary of State had, before the aggression of January 1991, threatened to return Iraq to the pre-industrial age. The first step in the right direction would be to lift the embargo imposed on Iraq, which had never had any justification and now had no rationale whatever when Iraq had discharged its obligations under the relevant Security Council resolutions.

71. **Miss Blackwood** (Jamaica), speaking as a youth representative, said that her delegation supported the statement made by Trinidad and Tobago on behalf of member States of the Caribbean Community (CARICOM). On behalf of the youth of her country, she wished to comment on some of the situations that presented a particular threat to young people. One such threat was the increase in armed conflicts and the use of children and young people as pawns in warfare, whether as targets or perpetrators. All concerned parties must work together to transform the vicious cycle of war into a culture of peace. Another situation that threatened young people was the widening gap between developed and developing countries. Despite the promised benefits of globalization developing countries were being increasingly marginalized in the world economy and faced problems of access to markets, capital and technology. The problems created by that international environment made the societies of developing countries like Jamaica more susceptible to criminal activities, drug-trafficking and the proliferation of small arms. Once again, it was the young people who usually fell victim to the dangers. The youth of Jamaica urged continued international cooperation on such matters as finance and development, poverty eradication and international drug control.

72. The World Programme of Action for Youth to the Year 2000 and Beyond, the adoption of the Lisbon Declaration on Youth Policies and Programmes, and the Braga Youth Action Plan were all important mechanisms for generating international cooperation. But the United Nations did not bear sole responsibility for action; the individual Member States must also play an important role. The Government of Jamaica had implemented a national youth policy aimed at

giving young people the opportunity to develop their full mental, social, spiritual and physical potential through training programmes to assist youth to be responsible, productive citizens.

73. Some of the initiatives implemented under the policy included the National Youth Service Programme, which enabled young persons aged 17 to 24 who were neither employed nor enrolled in an educational institution to receive job training and an opportunity to continue their education. Another example was a special training and empowerment programme launched in 1997 to provide young people with training in hospitality management, information technology and office-administration technology. In addition, courses had been developed to provide formal training in youth development and youth studies. The Government had also undertaken public awareness campaigns on drug abuse within the schools and the community at large. Similar programmes had been implemented to address the issue of HIV/AIDS.

74. The Jamaican Government had embraced the idea that young people should be given the opportunity to be heard. During the past year the Prime Minister had travelled around the country and held public forums with young people to discuss the issues affecting them. In 1998 a youth technology consultant had been appointed to accompany the Minister of Commerce and Technology to technology events dealing with youth-related matters and to provide the Minister with a young person's perspective on the world of information and technology.

75. She would urge the international community to remember that the rationale behind the World Programme of Action for Youth was not only to identify and create youth policies and programmes, but also to give youth an opportunity to be active participants.

The meeting rose at 12.20 p.m.

United Nations A/C.3/54/SR.5

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Chairman: Mr. Galluska ..... (Czech Republic)

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Agenda item 106: Social development, including questions relating to the world social situation and to youth, ageing, disabled persons and the family (*continued*)

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99-81502 (E)

The meeting was called to order at 10.05 a.m.

Agenda item 106: Social development, including questions relating to the world social situation and to youth, ageing, disabled persons and the family (*continued*) (A/54/56, 57, 59, 61 and Corr.1, 62, A/54/66-E/1999/6, A/54/98, A/54/128-E/1999/70, A/54/256, 268 and 388; A/C.3/54/L.2)

1. **Mr. Howell** (International Labour Organization) said that central to the mandate of the International Labour Organization (ILO) was a commitment to social development that went hand in hand with economic advance. ILO was working to combat poverty everywhere by promoting job creation. In November 1999, it would be hosting international consultations on the theme of promoting full, productive and freely chosen employment. In addition, it would be holding the Second ILO Enterprise Forum, with the participation of many business leaders.

2. With the adoption by the International Labour Conference in 1998 of the Declaration on Fundamental Principles and Rights at Work, ILO member States had demonstrated their desire to promote, realize and respect freedom of association, the right to collective bargaining, the abolition of forced labour and child labour, and the elimination of discrimination in employment. The Organization's commitment to social development had also been reflected in the launching of priority programmes to address its four strategic objectives, namely, the promotion and realization of fundamental rights at work, the improvement of opportunities for women and men to secure decent jobs and incomes, the enhancement of social protection, and the strengthening of tripartism and social dialogue.

3. In 1998, the International Labour Conference had called on member States to adopt balanced economic growth strategies, increase spending on education and develop innovative programmes aimed at, *inter alia*, promoting enterprise among young people to combat high youth unemployment and unemployment among disabled persons and members of ethnic minorities. In particular, ILO had been closely involved in promoting the youth employment aims of the World Programme of Action for Youth to the Year 2000 and Beyond. It had also played an active role in the World Conference of Ministers Responsible for Youth (Lisbon 1998) and the United Nations World Youth Forum.

4. ILO Recommendation No. 162 (1980) concerning Older Workers set out measures aimed at protecting the right of older persons to equal treatment in the workplace. The current International Year of Older Persons was an opportunity to consider how older workers adapted to new skills, whether early retirement should be used as a tool for alleviating youth unemployment and the social-security budgeting implications of such a policy; and what long-term social-security arrangements should be in place for older persons at the end of their working lives. ILO encouraged employment policies based on economic growth, enhanced opportunities for lifelong learning and training, flexible job planning to extend working lives, and innovative and sustainable social security and pension policies.

5. In furtherance of the aims of the World Programme of Action concerning disabled persons, ILO was seeking to equalize employment opportunities for persons with disabilities, by advising member States on developing appropriate legislative and institutional frameworks based on its Conventions, building a supportive environment for the social and economic integration of disabled persons, as well as a code of practice on managing disability and related matters in the workplace.

6. ILO was working in ever closer collaboration with other bodies of the United Nations system in preparing for the special session of the General Assembly in 2000 for an overall review and appraisal of the implementation of the outcome of the World Summit for Social Development. It had also played the leading role in the preparations for the high-level segment of the Economic and Social Council in 1999 on the role of employment and work in poverty eradication: the empowerment and advancement of women. Those themes, and the global challenges they represented, were among the ILO operational priorities.

7. **Mr. Hudson** (Australia) said that, as the first youth representative to be included in Australia's delegation to the General Assembly, he would focus on youth participation and representation in the United Nations and the international community, which remained less than universally accepted.

8. Persons aged 25 and under constituted 60 per cent of the global population. Their full and effective participation in society and decision-making was the most fundamental aspect of the World Programme of Action for Youth to the Year 2000 and Beyond. In many parts of the world, however, young people were excluded from participation in the decisions that influenced their lives, thus contributing to their alienation from society. Youth participation in policy- and decision-making was also important because it could lead to fresh approaches and new workable solutions to youth problems. In such areas as health care and drug prevention, the participation of young people in designing,

implementing and evaluating programmes was not only a matter of equity but added relevance for the target group.

9. The Australian Government was committed to communicating directly with young people on issues that concerned them. For that purpose, it was developing a programme entitled "Voices of Youth" and it recently created a national youth round table consisting of 50 young Australians from diverse backgrounds who met twice a year with members of Parliament to express their views. National youth media awards had been established to promote positive portrayals of young people in the media, and, in the year 2000, for the first time, a national youth week would be held to celebrate young Australians and promote their contribution to the society.

10. The participation of youth representatives in national delegations to relevant United Nations meetings provided an opportunity for youth perspectives to be considered and enabled the youth representatives to gain a better understanding of the complex political realities that shaped the United Nations agenda and its decisions. Accordingly, Australia wished to encourage other Member States to include young people in their delegations to the General Assembly.

11. **Ms. Enkhtsetseg** (Mongolia) said that while poverty remained a serious problem in Mongolia, some positive social trends were emerging: maternal mortality had begun to decline, primary school enrolment was improving and drop-out rates were down. Child survival conditions were better because of enhanced immunization rates. Reforms were being implemented with a view to developing education, health care and other social and cultural sectors but progress was slow due to lack of resources. Her Government was aware that social and economic policy, environmental concerns and good governance were interconnected, and that those four components of national development must work in harmony.

12. Cooperatives made an important contribution to the realization of social development goals by promoting employment and alleviating poverty, and through their role as production enterprises and providers of services to their members, who numbered almost 800 million worldwide. Her delegation welcomed the report of the Secretary-General on the status and role of cooperatives in the light of new economic and social trends (A/54/57), which had been enriched by the information provided by Governments and national cooperative organizations. The draft guidelines aimed at creating a supportive environment for the development of cooperatives contained in the annex to the report would give timely guidance to Governments on developing or revising their policies on cooperatives. Her delegation therefore urged the adoption of the draft guidelines by the General Assembly.

13. There were seven cooperative alliances comprising 2,000 individual cooperatives in Mongolia. Her Government had adopted a national programme for the development of cooperatives and established a national council charged with monitoring the implementation of the programme under the chairmanship of the Minister of Agriculture and Industry. The programme's main objective was to involve cooperatives in the promotion of national development goals, particularly job creation, poverty reduction and the provision of reliable social services to the population. Mongolia's national legislation on cooperatives had been revised in 1998 to incorporate the main principles of the Statement on Cooperative Identity adopted in 1995 at the Centennial Congress of the International Cooperative Alliance.

14. Mongolia attached particular importance to the attainment of the goals of the World Declaration on Education for All. Her delegation was therefore disappointed that the interim report of the Secretary-General and of the Director-General of the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO) on progress towards the goal of education for all: the year 2000 Assessment (A/54/128-E/1999/70) contained no substantive proposals regarding the launching of a United Nations decade to eradicate illiteracy, despite a request to that effect in General Assembly resolution 52/84. Mongolia believed that such an initiative would spur the international community to make a renewed political commitment to rendering quality education accessible to all. Her delegation would be submitting a draft resolution on education for all requesting the Secretary-General and the Director-General of UNESCO to submit a proposal, accompanied by a plan of action, to the General Assembly at its fifty-fifth session with a view to proclaiming the period 2001-2010 as the United Nations decade to eradicate illiteracy.

15. **Mr. Jassim** (Bahrain) said that Bahrain had always provided equal access, free of charge, to education, health care and social welfare as essential components of human rights. It had made strenuous efforts to improve the qualifications of its young people, develop their intellectual capacities and promote their social advancement.

16. With more than 70 per cent of government spending allocated to the infrastructure, social, economic and educational sectors, the benefits of development had been made available to the community in general, and had resulted in Bahrain's high ranking in the UNDP Human Development Index over the past five years.

17. The family was the fundamental nucleus of society and was recognized as such by the Constitution of Bahrain. Many of the country's governmental and non-governmental agencies had accordingly implemented family-oriented programmes, and the Bahrain Family Planning and Family Welfare Association had been established in 1975 in order to promote awareness of the concepts of family planning and reproductive health as legitimate human rights.

18. Bahrain had participated actively in the observance of the International Year of Older Persons in 1999. Respect for older persons was a cultural trait that was reflected in the country's policy and doubtless stemmed from the heritage of the people of Bahrain and the customs, traditions and values that embodied the principles of the Islamic religion and enjoined respect for parents and concern for the well-being of the elderly. The State had established legal guarantees of full rights for older persons and had enacted legislation providing for retirement insurance.

19. In implementation of the relevant United Nations resolutions, Bahrain had made much progress in providing for the welfare of disabled persons. State and non-governmental agencies had accorded special attention to disabled persons in the belief that expenditure on their care and rehabilitation was a productive investment with a direct economic return in terms of human resources development. A National Institution for Services to Disabled Persons had been established, and its tasks included the formulation of appropriate public policy, the drafting of relevant legislation, the preparation of studies to identify needs, and cooperation with regional and international organizations operating in the same field.

20. **Mr. Shen Guofang** (China) said that the basis for global social development was the steady growth of the world economy in a stable and peaceful environment. To counter the adverse effects on that economy of the financial crises in some countries over the past two years all members of the international community must work together to promote steady economic growth in a spirit of responsibility and risk-sharing in order to achieve prosperity for all.

21. Poverty eradication should be the central task of global social development. Progress towards that goal had been slow thus far, and more than 1 billion people around the world were still living in extreme poverty. Given the economic interdependence deriving from globalization, developed countries had a duty to offer technological and financial assistance to developing countries in their efforts to eradicate poverty.

22. His delegation hoped that the special session of the General Assembly in June 2000 devoted to the follow-up to the World Summit for Social Development would give new impetus to global social development. The topics for discussion should include the impact of globalization, trade liberalization and the information revolution on global social development; problems related to rural development; and the enhancement of the role of the United Nations in coordinating international cooperation for social development. Developed countries should be urged to meet the official development assistance target of 0.7 per cent of gross national product, and a clear timetable should be worked out for the realization of that goal.

23. His Government would continue to implement the commitments made at the Copenhagen Summit. It was actively involved in the preparations for the special session. On 11 October 1999, it would host an international symposium on social development. Experts from different regions would be invited to discuss the role of Governments and the market in promoting social progress. The outcome of the symposium would be a direct contribution to the special session.

24. **Mr. Balanandan** (India) said that his delegation had paid close attention to events held to review the implementation of the World Programme of Action for Youth to the Year 2000 and Beyond and welcomed the adoption of the Braga Youth Action Plan at the third session of the World Youth Forum held in Portugal. His delegation expressed appreciation to the Governments of Turkey and Senegal for offering to host the forthcoming World Conference of Ministers Responsible for Youth and the next session of the World Youth Forum.

25. In an age of information revolution and globalization, issues related to youth should be seen in the context of social and economic development and the potential of youth to be a major force for social change through increased participation in political systems should be specifically acknowledged.

26. Five years after the declaration of the International Year of the Family in 1994, there was a need to take stock of new developments affecting the family. Problems arising from broken homes, neglect, economic stress and inter-generational conflict were on the rise everywhere. A fresh assessment of the role of the family as an institution for social stability was needed.

27. The role of education as the primary instrument of progress could not be overstated. His delegation fully supported the report of the Secretary-General and of the Director-General of UNESCO (A/54/128-E/1999/70), which redefined education as going beyond literacy, to include the

acquisition of skills and competence in different social settings.

28. Persons with disabilities should be targeted more effectively by the social services in order to unleash their productive potential. Education and affirmative action to provide sustainable livelihoods for the disabled were a necessity. The World Programme of Action concerning Disabled Persons, the United Nations Standard Rules for Equalization of Opportunities for Persons with Disabilities, and the Long-term Strategy to Implement the World Programme of Action concerning Disabled Persons to the Year 2000 and Beyond were important initiatives in achieving that objective.

29. While the significance of cooperatives had dwindled in the context of rapid globalization and corporate transnationalism, cooperatives now had a new role to play as organizations for self-help and self-reliance. By pooling resources, contributing voluntary labour and bargaining collectively, societies could provide themselves with health care, education and other basic services at the grass-roots level without awaiting action by Governments. His delegation therefore welcomed the guidelines aimed at creating a supportive environment for the development of cooperatives, as outlined in the report of the Secretary-General on the subject (A/54/57), and was glad to have co-sponsored the draft resolution on cooperatives.

30. **Ms. Oliverio-Relang** (Marshall Islands) said that, over the last three years, her country had faced the challenge of economic reforms, natural phenomena such as El Niño and the effects of the Asian financial crisis. Together with the country's high population growth rate of 3.8 per cent, those factors had affected social development. The Marshall Islands endorsed unreservedly the outcome of the World Summit for Social Development, particularly the 20/20 principle, and spent more than 20 per cent of its budget on social issues. Its national policies on population, women and youth were the primary instruments for fulfilling the commitments made at the Summit.

31. To overcome the difficulties of living in a small island developing State where the main services and activities were concentrated in only two urban centres, the country had established a mobile team for community development to provide outlying communities with information on nutrition and population issues. The Ministry of Education carried out a similar campaign on community-based local governance for outer island local governments and communities. Those efforts were intended to empower communities for social development at the grass-roots level. In addition, the Government would convene a second National Economic and Social Summit to build partnerships for the benefit of the outer island communities.

32. With 50 per cent of its population under the age of 15, the Government faced major challenges in ensuring social development, equality and progress and in meeting the steadily increasing demand for educational and health services. Government initiatives such as the National Youth Policy would help young people to meet some of the challenges of the new millennium. In addition, the non-governmental organization Youth to Youth in Health implemented a programme on health awareness, leadership skills, peer teaching and cultural appreciation that targeted young people at high risk for unwanted pregnancy, suicide or alcohol abuse. The success of that programme was largely responsible for the continuing decline in births among teenagers. Currently, the organization was seeking donor contributions to build a youth health centre; the Government stood ready to provide information on that project to interested donor countries and agencies.

33. **Mr. Ryan** (Ireland) said that, in October 1998, Ireland had hosted the United Nations Workshop on Technology and Families. In exploring the impact of the technological revolution on families, the Workshop had emphasized the areas of education, communication and information; work and employment; and health and basic social services. It had focused, *inter alia*, on the societal and lifestyle consequences of the introduction of technology into society.

34. The participants in the Workshop had called for research on the impact of technology on families, for parallel development of opportunities through adult education and for early recognition that families should not become simply passive recipients of services. In addition, they had agreed that the privacy and integrity of personal information stored on computer must be protected. The findings of the Workshop would help to guide Governments in investigating the changes experienced by families as a result of technological innovation. Of particular relevance were the employment opportunities generated through a more directed application of new technologies, *inter alia* for disabled family members.

35. The discussions at the Workshop had also dealt with the special needs of developing countries in coping with modern technology and the ways in which new communications technologies could increase access to health and basic services in those countries. The participants had recommended the use of family impact assessments in framing policies involving technology. Moreover, they had acknowledged the potential of non-governmental organizations to help families minimize the negative impact

of the Internet on children and young people and to act as partners in the delivery of social services and preventive health care.

36. **Mr. Rabuka** (Fiji) said that improved longevity had created the "greying" of society in Fiji so that between 1995 and 2025, the number of people over the age of 60 was expected to increase by 233 per cent. However, the economic and social implications of that demographic shift were not yet fully recognized or understood. Senior citizens in Fiji were not required to pay value-added tax on basic food items or on medical expenses and supplies. Plans were under way to make available loans of up to $2,000 from the country's Poverty Alleviation Fund, improve social security for the elderly and destitute and enable self-employed persons to contribute to the Fiji National Provident Fund so that they could benefit from the Fund's retirement scheme.

37. Discrimination on the ground of disability was prohibited in Fiji, and aggrieved persons could seek legal redress for denial of their fundamental human rights. The National Council for Disabled Persons provided the framework for government action with respect to the disabled and for the implementation of the relevant international instruments. The Government was committed to ensuring the rehabilitation of the disabled so that they could be gainfully employed. It acknowledged that more could be done to guarantee the full and equal participation of the disabled in community affairs and to ensure the exercise of their human rights, but it needed time and resources to meet its obligations.

38. The dissolution of the extended family owing to the migration of some family members to urban areas in search of employment presented a major social challenge. The Government of Fiji was committed to strengthening the family; to that end, it was reviewing the current rates of taxation and allowances. The family component of development projects and the family activities of the specialized agencies should be strengthened to build institutional capacity for research, data collection and collaboration among States and to support the formulation and implementation of family-related policies and programmes in developing countries, especially small island developing States.

39. Fiji agreed with the view, expressed in the report of the Secretary-General on the implementation of the World Programme of Action for Youth to the Year 2000 and Beyond (A/54/59), that the situation and prospects of young people were closely related to the general economic and social conditions in each country and to the State's economic ability to generate employment. Fiji was carrying out a number of activities to implement the World Programme of Action, including agricultural and non-agricultural skill training, youth training and the formulation and implementation of an integrated intersectoral policy for youth development in the new millennium. Society as a whole paid the price for the high rates of youth unemployment and underemployment.

40. Fiji appreciated the World Bank's enhanced poverty strategy, which would involve the International Monetary Fund (IMF) and other actors. However, national efforts to achieve economic growth required an enabling international trading environment imbued with a strong sense of economic and social justice. In particular, small island developing States such as Fiji could not receive an equitable share of the benefits of the global trading system without improved market access, special and differential treatment of their products and enhanced institutional capacity to make the most of global trading opportunities. In the forthcoming World Trade Organization (WTO) negotiations on trade liberalization, it must be borne in mind that the global trading system could not become a level playing field without the free movement of human capital. The failure to incorporate human resources into globalization and trade liberalization was responsible for the slow economic development of many developing countries.

41. Fiji was disappointed by the apparent reluctance of its partners to meet their obligations under the Programme of Action for the Sustainable Development of Small Island Developing States. The international community could not turn a blind eye to the situation of the poor in developing countries or to the efforts made at the national level to address the needs and concerns of the poor. The commitments made at the international level must be translated into action to help the poor regain their dignity and find a meaningful existence.

42. **Mr. Al-Sudairy** (Saudi Arabia) said that his Government was doing its utmost to achieve the highest standards of social development. The country's Basic Law of Government, which was based on the teachings of Islam and the principle of consultation, ensured a secure social climate through the enactment of laws and regulations that protected members of society from injustice and discrimination or anything that might restrict their freedom of movement or action. Social welfare services helped to protect the community from deviance and adverse social manifestations while endeavouring to make inactive human resources productive and self-supporting.

43. The Social Security Administration had been established in 1962, and its functions included the oversight

and regulation of assistance to entitled families and individuals. It provided two types of assistance, namely allowances and welfare benefits. Allowances were for those disabled by advanced age, for orphans and the fatherless and for widows and divorced women who had no one to support them; and welfare benefits were for the totally disabled, the families of prison inmates and the victims of random catastrophes and disasters.

44. The Government's efforts were supplemented by those of charitable institutions and non-governmental organizations motivated by Islamic principles and teachings. The Ministry of Labour and Social Affairs encouraged citizens to establish voluntary organizations to meet the needs of individuals and groups at the local level, and there were 142 such charitable societies that received annual subsidies from the Government.

45. Pursuant to the Government's policy of promoting the welfare and productive employment of disabled persons, opportunities were available to them in governmental and non-governmental agencies. In workplaces where 50 or more persons were employed, and where the nature of the work permitted, at least 2 per cent of the workforce were required to be suitably trained disabled persons.

46. The health care provided by the Saudi Arabian Government in pursuance of the principle of "Health for all" as a national strategy had produced effective results. The statistics on numbers of doctors, hospitals, hospital beds and health centres and on the ratios of doctors and nurses to the general population showed that there had been a great and rapid expansion in health care with a high percentage of the population immunized against major diseases resulting in a sharp decline in the numbers of victims of such diseases. Saudi Arabia ranked with the industrially advanced countries in terms of its infant mortality rate and under-5 mortality rate.

47. Saudi Arabia had achieved the goals established in the 1995 Copenhagen Declaration on Social Development and Programme of Action of the World Summit for Social Development. It had done so through a combination of conservatism and contemporaneity. Its conservatism had focused on the preservation of religious and moral values through the application of Islamic principles, and its contemporaneity had consisted in the pursuit of overall development with a view to ensuring the well-being of the members of the community with due regard for the formation of a worthy and productive citizenry that was aware of its responsibilities and its role in serving society.

48. **Mr. García González** (El Salvador) said that he supported the statement made on behalf of the Group of 77 and China under agenda item 106. In line with the World Programme of Action concerning Disabled Persons and the elements suggested in the Long-term Strategy to Implement the World Programme of Action concerning Disabled Persons to the Year 2000 and Beyond, his Government had set up a national commission to propose revisions and reforms of current legislation concerning disabled persons which had led to the establishment of a National Council for the General Welfare of Persons with Disabilities (CONAIPD) to meet the enormous demand from Salvadorans who suffered from some type of disability as a direct result of the armed conflict.

49. The Council was made up of a number of government Ministries and institutions that dealt *inter alia* with the family, health, education, labour and social security and of various non-governmental organizations. It had prepared a draft law on the equalization of opportunities for persons with disabilities, which would introduce a legal regime for persons with any type of physical or mental disability and would establish the care institutions and agencies they required. The Council had also prepared a policy document on the equalization of opportunities for persons with disabilities. Those efforts had been widely publicized through an information programme on disability designed to raise awareness of the issue and to suggest ways in which the population could support the Council's activities.

50. National efforts to assist the disabled must be linked to those of the international community, particularly through the implementation of the relevant suggestions made at the World Conference on Human Rights, the International Conference on Population and Development, the World Summit for Social Development, the Fourth World Conference on Women and the second United Nations Conference on Human Settlements. He hoped that national and international efforts would be redoubled to ensure that the deliberations at the 2002 quinquennial review and appraisal of the World Programme of Action adequately reflected the issues that must be addressed in the areas of social integration, technology, information and comprehensive protection to guarantee equitable development for the disabled in the new millennium.

51. **Mr. Sergiwa** (Libyan Arab Jamahiriya) said that at the threshold of the new millennium the world social situation was deteriorating: the rich were getting richer, and the poor were getting poorer; unemployment was on the rise; and in many countries social inequality was growing. The situation would continue to worsen in the absence of the political will to create an international climate that was supportive of national efforts to eliminate poverty, create full and productive employment and achieve social integration.

52. The disabled constituted a vulnerable group that merited the concern of the international community to integrate them into their societies and to implement the World Programme of Action concerning Disabled Persons. The Libyan Arab Jamahiriya had taken the initiative with respect to the proclamation of 1981 as the International Year of Disabled Persons and had chaired the Advisory Committee for the Year. Its concern for disabled persons and the fact that it had sought to alert the international community to their plight should not be surprising because the country continued to have a great number of citizens who had been disabled by the mines and other remnants of war left there after the Second World War. His delegation reiterated its demand that the countries responsible should comply with the General Assembly resolutions requiring them to remove the mines and to provide compensation for the damage caused. The mines were still maiming, disabling and killing innocent people.

53. The breakup of families and the disappearance of the extended family from any societies had exacerbated the problems faced by older persons and had led to a search for alternative ways to provide them with social services. The observance of the International Year of Older Persons in 1999 had been a step in the right direction and had promoted awareness of the needs of the elderly and of their contributions to society.

54. His delegation affirmed the right of young people to education, employment and health care. The implementation at the national level of the World Programme of Action for Youth to the Year 2000 and Beyond level would promote the formulation of integrated national youth policies designed to satisfy the needs and aspirations of young people and to involve them in all matters that concerned them.

55. Among the social and economic measures and policies aimed at developing its human resources, the Libyan Arab Jamahiriya provided education to all free of charge until completion of the elementary level, free health services, and free social security services for widows, disabled persons and the elderly. It strived for equality between the sexes, enhancement of the role of women in development and the protection of the family as the foundation of society. It had enacted legislation providing numerous benefits to disabled people, enhancing their role in society and insuring equal opportunities for them. Special attention was paid to developing the skills and abilities of young people by ensuring their right to education, quality health care and employment and by meeting their special needs and promoting their participation in development and decision-making.

56. Those developments had taken place despite the coercive economic sanctions imposed on the Libyan people in the early 1990s, which had caused it enormous losses and had impeded plans and programmes designed to meet the needs of vulnerable groups in society.

57. **Ms. Ramiro Lopez** (Philippines) said that the situation of persons with disabilities in her country was of increasing concern to her Government since about 10 per cent of the population was disabled. Government policy stressed prevention of disability, rehabilitation and equalization of opportunities for disabled persons, protecting their rights and providing services to hasten their integration into society. The human rights of disabled persons had been protected by the adoption of the Magna Carta for Disabled Persons in 1992, the inclusion of a separate section on disabled persons in the national human rights plan for the period 1996-2000, and the strengthening of the accessibility law.

58. Her delegation noted with satisfaction the encouraging developments outlined in the report of the Secretary-General on the implementation of the World Programme of Action concerning Disabled Persons (A/54/388), including the increased interest of non-governmental organizations, civil society and the private sector in equalizing opportunities for persons with disabilities through the innovative use of information technology. Her delegation expressed its appreciation to the United Nations Department of Economic and Social Affairs for its assistance in organizing the seminar on Internet accessibility and persons with disabilities that had been sponsored by the Association of South-East Asian Nations (ASEAN).

59. Further efforts to promote the rights of persons with disabilities and equalize opportunities for them were needed. Her delegation would welcome an exchange of best practices in those areas and a greater focus on the needs of disabled children. In that regard, it was crucial to generate information and comparable data in order to monitor and promote the implementation of the World Programme of Action. Her delegation called upon Member States to make use of the technical expertise of the United Nations Statistics Division for that purpose.

60. The global youth population, now numbered one billion, and the magnitude of youth concerns could not be ignored. Her Government had formulated a medium-term youth development plan for the period 1999-2004 and had strengthened the participation of youth in governance by appointing a Commissioner on Youth and establishing a capacity-building programme for youth leaders. Her delegation noted with satisfaction the increasing number of Member States that had implemented national youth

programmes and welcomed the holding in Portugal in 1998 of the World Conference of Ministers Responsible for Youth and the World Youth Forum of the United Nations System.

61. Her delegation also welcomed the Secretary-General's proposal that United Nations research and policy initiatives should be focused on the further implementation of the World Programme of Action, as stated in paragraph 92 of document A/54/59. Her Government also supported efforts to strengthen the Youth Unit of the Secretariat through the provision of United Nations interns and volunteers.

62. Turning to the report of the Secretary-General on the follow-up to the International Year of the Family (A/54/256), she said that her Government was continuing to implement its plan of action for the family for the period 1994-2000. That plan addressed family concerns in such areas as livelihoods, family values and culture, criminality and domestic violence. Her delegation supported actions that included a family-sensitive approach to development strategies; for that reason, it welcomed the family-related activities of the Secretariat, including the efforts to monitor the impact of global social and economic trends on families.

63. Beyond national efforts, addressing pressing social development issues required international cooperation. There was a need to prepare human resources, particularly in developing countries, for globalization and modernization, while at the same time promoting greater social cohesion.

64. **Mr. Donokusumo** (Indonesia) said that the impact of the global economy on youth had been particularly harsh in some countries. Declining levels of official development assistance and financial flows, as well as debt obligations, had adversely affected the daily lives of young people. His delegation therefore agreed with the Secretary-General that youth problems should be seen in the context of the current state of international cooperation and it reaffirmed the importance of the World Programme of Action for Youth to the Year 2000 and Beyond.

65. His Government had incorporated issues concerning youth into its five-year development plans. Despite recent setbacks, Indonesian young people had continued to play an active and vibrant role in the exercise of democracy.

66. His delegation welcomed the interim report of the Secretary-General and of the Director-General of UNESCO on progress towards the goal of education for all by the year 2000 (A/54/128-E/1999/70) and the fact that more than two thirds of the world's population were now literate. His Government remained committed to achieving the goal of basic education for all by the year 2003.

67. His delegation supported initiatives to increase awareness of international norms and standards for the disabled that were essential if disabled persons were to engage in mainstream activities. In 1997 his Government had adopted Public Act No. 4 on the Disabled Person, which stipulated the equal rights of the disabled, including their right to have access to social services. His Government remained committed to strengthening the social safety net and to providing, within its limited means, for the disabled and other vulnerable groups.

68. **Mr. Fadaifard** (Islamic Republic of Iran) said that the momentum of social development in Iran had quickened, with further initiatives being taken to implement the Copenhagen Declaration and with global awareness on ageing being raised as a result of the observance of the International Year of Older Persons. Nevertheless, nearly five years after the World Summit for Social Development, progress towards compliance with the Summit commitments had not been as great as had been hoped.

69. Although Governments bore the primary responsibility for the creation of an enabling environment for social development, the international community must participate in that effort in view of the interdependence between national and international economies. Trade issues, in particular the removal of non-trade barriers and unilateral coercive measures, needed to be addressed. Another area of concern was the unfavourable international financial situation, which had derailed the social development efforts of developing countries in recent years.

70. The goal of full employment was also far from having been achieved. The problem needed to be addressed nationally, by supporting the private and informal sectors, promoting self-employment, providing credit facilities to the unemployed, encouraging the creation of volunteer organizations and investing in training programmes; internationally, by dismantling trade barriers, ensuring adequate capital flows to developing nations, encouraging technology transfer, alleviating the debt burden and sharing experiences.

71. The Government of the Islamic Republic of Iran accorded the highest priority to social justice, understood as the creation of equal opportunities for all citizens, particularly in their access to social services. It had made social development one of the prime objectives of its second five-year national development plan instituted in 1995. Despite the adverse effects of external conflict, social indicators showed that during the second decade of the Islamic Revolution the country had made great strides in the implementation of social development plans, although their

sustainability would require fundamental economic reforms. Some measures to improve the economic condition of lower-income families had been taken and others were planned under both the second and third five-year plans.

72. Recognizing the importance of involving youth in the cultural, social and economic life of the society, the Government in March 1999 had created the National Youth Centre as the executive body for the previously established Supreme Council for Youth. Some of the main functions of the Centre were to coordinate policy implementation with other organizations, both governmental and non-governmental; devise and execute projects to meet the needs of young people; help create new vocational and educational opportunities; ensure greater access of young couples to housing; and conduct studies on issues of importance to youth. Other promising initiatives for youth included the establishment of a parliamentary committee on women, family and youth and the creation of a data bank on youth. Among the successes were observable increases in levels of education and rates of employment.

73. **Mr. Ocazionez** (Colombia) said that his delegation supported the statements made by Guyana on behalf of the Group of 77 and by Mexico on behalf of the Rio Group.

74. His delegation noted with satisfaction the efforts made by the Special Rapporteur of the Commission for Social Development for the implementation of the United Nations Standard Rules for Equalization of Opportunities for Persons with Disabilities.

75. Science and technology had made an impressive contribution to the well-being of persons with disabilities, especially by improving their mobility and speech capacities. While his delegation welcomed the opportunities offered by the Internet, efforts should be made to ensure that technological advances helped to eliminate the disparities in living conditions between the North and South countries.

76. In Colombia, the situation of persons with disabilities was a growing public health problem. Accordingly, his Government had announced a national plan of action for disabled persons for the period 1999-2002. While there were as yet no reliable statistics on the size of the disabled population, it was estimated that about 4.5 million Colombians suffered from physical, sensory and mental limitations. For that reason, his delegation expressed appreciation for the efforts made by the United Nations Statistics Division to prepare a manual that could assist countries in compiling data.

77. The national plan was his Government's response to the recommendations contained in General Assembly resolution 52/82 concerning accessibility, provision of services and employment for the disabled. It encompassed such areas as prevention and rehabilitation, education, family and job integration, greater access to sports, cultural recreation and tourism, as well as communication and transport.

78. The plan's main goals were to reduce the frequency of events leading to disability and invalidity, to strengthen and expand social services, and to increase the economic and social integration of persons with disabilities. His Government hoped that its efforts would be strengthened through international cooperation with the United Nations and non-governmental organizations.

79. **Mr. Mahbubani** (Singapore) said that it was far from certain that Western society had found the right answers to the social questions facing all nations. Many developed Western societies were plagued by high crime rates, high personal insecurity, high divorce rates, growing numbers of single-parent families and increasing drug use. Nevertheless, they continued to export their values vigorously. Many of those values were being transported through the television programmes and movies that reached into homes everywhere thanks to satellite TV. The lifestyles deemed acceptable in Hollywood — single parenthood, gay marriages, drug consumption — were unfortunately seen as models by many young people around the globe. Each society was obliged to find its own means of educating its people on the dangers of adopting such lifestyles.

80. Western values were being exported actively through proselytizing and coercion. As an example, the European Union planned to introduce a resolution in the Committee calling upon all States to abolish the death penalty and was prepared to coerce some developing countries, especially aid recipients, to vote in favour of the social value systems it favoured.

81. The point at issue was not the merits of the death penalty but the right of a small group of countries from one continent to impose their views on the rest of the world. Each society made its decision on the death penalty on the basis of a complex matrix of social, cultural and religious values. In pushing for abolition of the death penalty the European Union was declaring that its value system was superior to those of other societies. Many European values, such as the rule of law, had been proven to be of great benefit and had been adopted by other countries. But they had made that choice voluntarily; it had not been forced to upon them.

82. It might seem strange to speak at length about the death penalty in a speech about the importance of the family,

but the issues were interrelated. Value systems all over the world were being challenged by the new global onslaught of information and new forms of cultural imperialism. Societies outside of the developed world were being subjected to social, economic and political pressures to change. If the family patterns found in many developed societies became the global norm, the traditional family composed of two parents in a stable marriage who protected and nurtured their children might be endangered.

83. The twenty-first century would witness a great social debate, a new Darwinian contest for the survival of the best social values and practices. Ideally each society should be allowed to choose freely. The problem was that the developed societies would like to use the political and economic strength they had accumulated to force the rest of the world to accept their social prescription. It was to be hoped that the Committee would not allow such coercion to succeed.

84. **Mr. Mutaboba** (Rwanda) said that the Government of Rwanda had been working to reverse the terrible devastation caused by the wave of killing in 1994 and to move forward on a path of social development that emphasized the inherent capacities and values of individuals. With support from friendly countries and international institutions, it had rehabilitated infrastructure, including industries, roads, and technical institutions, so that production had increased. Basic commodities and services were once again available. Inflation had been reduced to 2 per cent, to the great satisfaction of the citizens, as well as the International Monetary Fund and the World Bank. The country's financial institutions had been granting soft loans to finance individual projects. Nonetheless, much remained to be done. Unemployment and health problems, notably HIV/AIDS and malaria, presented a difficult challenge. Rwanda appealed to the international community to supplement the efforts of the Government.

85. Rwanda had a separate Ministry of Youth because of the importance it attached to youth issues. The experience of Rwanda showed how grave the youth problem could be when young people were misdirected into criminal activities. The majority of the genocidal forces in 1994 had been drawn from the ranks of youth and trained by the ruling genocidal regime to serve as militia. As a result, much time and effort had to be spent to rehabilitate young people who had been turned into killers and rapists. Another youth initiative had been to organize solidarity camps to bring together young people from all over the country to engage in open political dialogue. The majority of Rwandan youth were unaware of their human rights and had to be taught.

86. Since poverty could lead youth into dubious activities, the Government and civil society worked hand in hand to set up micro-credit schemes to fund joint ventures, thus creating employment and improving standards of living. Technical institutions had been set up to teach urgently needed skills, thanks to the assistance of the United Nations Development Programme, the United States of America, the Russian Federation and other friendly nations.

87. As in other African societies, it was natural to Rwandans to respect older persons as sources of inspiration, guidance and knowledge of the past. Many older persons had been left on their own when their families had been massacred in 1994 and were receiving government assistance. The events of 1994 had also left many people injured, physically or mentally. They had been organized into cooperative movements to make assistance easier, and some were living together in so-called "grouped villages", an arrangement which improved morale.

88. **The Chairman** drew attention to Economic and Social Council resolution 1999/18 entitled "Policies and programmes involving youth", contained in document A/C.3/54/L.2, which had been recommended by the Council for adoption by the General Assembly.

89. **Ms. Paiva** (Portugal), speaking on behalf of the sponsors of the resolution in the Commission for Social Development, announced a revision to the text in the form of the addition of a new paragraph to follow paragraph 15. The proposed new paragraph was similar to paragraph 9 of General Assembly resolution 52/83 and read:

> "*Reiterates* the call made in the World Programme of Action to Member States to consider including youth representatives in their delegations to the General Assembly and other relevant United Nations meetings, thus broadening the channels of communication and enhancing the discussion of youth-related issues, and requests the Secretary-General to convey again this invitation to Member States;"

The meeting rose at 12.30 p.m.

United Nations A/C.3/54/SR.6

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Summary record of the 6th meeting
Held at Headquarters, New York, on Friday, 8 October 1999, at 3 p.m.

Chairman: Mr. Galuška ..... (Czech Republic)

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Agenda item 106: Social development, including questions relating to the world social situation and to youth, ageing, disabled persons and the family (*continued*)

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The meeting was called to order at 3.05 p.m.

Agenda item 106: Social development, including questions relating to the world social situation and to youth, ageing, disabled persons and the family (*continued*) (A/54/3, A/54/56, A/54/57, A/54/59, A/54/61 and Corr.1, A/54/62, A/54/66-E/1999/6, A/54/98, A/54/128-E/1999/70, A/54/256, A/54/268, A/54/388 and A/C.3/54/L.2)

1. **Mr. Akinsanya** (Nigeria) said that the fifty-fourth session of the General Assembly had devoted a two-day plenary meeting to the International Year of Older Persons, in recognition of the important role that older persons played in shaping world events. His delegation associated itself with the statement made by Guyana on behalf of the Group of 77 and China. It also supported the objectives of the International Year and the statement made by the Secretary-General while launching the International Year of Older Persons on 1 October 1998 to the effect that a society for all ages was one that did not caricature older persons as patients and pensioners. Instead, it saw them as both agents and beneficiaries of development and honoured traditional elders in their leadership and consultative roles in communities throughout the world.

2. Within the context of the launching of the International Year of Older Persons, his country's Ministry of Women's Affairs and Social Development had organized, in collaboration with non-governmental organizations, a special seminar on the role of the aged in national development.

3. Owing to its multi-ethnic culture and traditions, Nigeria had considerable respect for older persons and was therefore concerned about their increasing neglect, especially in developing countries, where deteriorating economic conditions adversely affected their situation and welfare. His country, like other African countries, believed that care for the elderly should be family based. That was consistent with the time honoured cultural traditions of Nigeria, which saw the elderly as repositories of wisdom and values, which were best imparted to the younger generation within the family setting. Within the family environment, the elderly could take advantage of the warmth and filial love of the immediate as well as extended family members. That approach had been recommended by the International Plan of Action on Ageing adopted by the World Assembly on Ageing held in Vienna in 1982.

4. Another important measure aimed at encouraging care for the elderly within the family setting was the granting of tax rebates to those who took care of their parents. In the last few years, his Government had taken concrete measures to further alleviate the plight of the weaker segments of society, including the elderly. The measures taken included the family support programme and the family economic advancement programme designed to improve the living conditions and well being of people at the grass roots, especially in the rural areas. Moreover, his Government had undertaken a review of pensions along with upward salary reviews in the public sector as a way of insulating pensioners from the ravages of inflation. Efforts were under way to expand the coverage of the Nigerian national social insurance trust fund to include pensioners outside the public sector.

5. The umbilical link between childhood, youth and old age also needed to be underscored. It was often said that the child of today would grow up to become the elderly person of tomorrow. It was therefore important to look at issues pertaining to childhood, youth and older persons in a holistic manner if a society for all ages was to be achieved. For those reasons, his Government had recently restructured the former Ministry of Youth and Sports into a new Ministry of Women's Affairs and Youth Development in order to achieve better coordination, efficiency and integration of all programmes in those spheres.

6. Nigeria fully supported the decisions adopted at the World Conference of Ministers Responsible for Youth held in Lisbon in August 1998. With renewed determination, the international community would be able to overcome the problems that had persistently afflicted the institution of the family. Those problems included the impact of the HIV/AIDS pandemic, which was particularly acute in Africa. In many cases, the younger generation was the worst afflicted by that scourge, which rendered the more vulnerable segments of society, namely the elderly, helpless by saddling them with the task of taking care of those who should normally take care of them.

7. The majority of older persons worldwide were women. Therefore, Member States should fully take into account their concerns, given the peculiar problems they faced in terms of limited opportunities for social, economic and political empowerment, unlike men. It was therefore important that national activities commemorating the remaining part of the International Year of Older Persons should reflect those factors.

8. Despite so many difficulties, through common effort, determination and political will, the quality of life of families, including the youth and the elderly, could be enhanced. The international community should take on the collective responsibility of ushering in the twenty-first

century with the vision of creating a better and genuine society for all ages.

9. **Ms. Fonseca** (Venezuela) said that her delegation associated itself with the statements made by Guyana on behalf of the Group of 77 and China, and by Mexico, on behalf of the Rio Group. A gender perspective should be incorporated into the implementation of programmes of action designed to address the problems of the most vulnerable groups of society, bearing in mind their specific needs. Moreover, account should be taken of the impact of the political, economic, cultural and environmental changes that had occurred in recent decades, including the phenomenon of globalization, on those groups.

10. The main thrust of Venezuela's policy was social development. Participatory democracy was the focal point of development and for achieving the goals set. Her Government had established a single social welfare fund to make only one entity responsible for the mobilization and administration of resources in order to optimize policies and plans, regulate welfare programmes for strengthening comprehensive health care and education, promote a grass-roots and competitive economy, promote and develop microenterprises and cooperatives as a form of grass-roots involvement in economic activity and in job training for young people and adults.

11. The Venezuelan National Council for the Integration of Disabled Persons was responsible for harmonizing policy in that area, and, in June 1998, had held its first summit meeting with a view to coordinating measures and policies for the integration of disabled persons into development. Her Government welcomed the exchange of experiences, supported all international initiatives aimed at strengthening institutions and policies for the benefit of disabled persons, and commended the elaboration of the Inter-American Convention for the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination for Reasons of Disability.

12. Aware of the attention needed by young people, the Venezuelan Government had provided training courses in various areas so that they could develop productive and useful activities, and had set up a local social network offering protection for children and adolescents at high social risk. It had also consolidated the national youth prevention and social and job integration system, through job training, the dissemination and promotion of job opportunities, the integration of young people into the labour market, prevention and social integration programmes, a campaign against drugs, and the strengthening and expansion of networks to promote the interests of young people.

13. Her Government placed high priority on education and intended to provide free education so that the whole population could have access thereto. As a result of that commitment, 600,000 children had enrolled in the new school year beginning in September 1999. Pre-school education was a fundamental phase in the development of cognitive ability. During the current school year, therefore, the Ministry of Education hoped to enrol 300,000 neglected children in educational programmes and in addition to strengthen assistance to day-care centres and group homes.

14. With regard to the needs and potential of older persons, she said that the National Geriatric and Gerontological Institute administered shelters for older persons, homes where older persons could live and work in agriculture, care units for older persons, a gerontology training programme, a nutritional care programme and a cultural and employment reactivation centre, the objective of which was to reintegrate those over 50 years of age into the labour market.

15. It was essential to redefine the role and significance of the family for the new century and social and development programmes should seek to defend the family unit against the disintegration currently occurring. When participating in the observance of the International Day of Families, the First Lady of Venezuela had emphasized the need to re-establish the family as the pillar of the whole society, to protect its role as the guardian of the people's cultural traditions and effective values, and to strengthen its formative, educational and productive capacities. The tenth anniversary of the International Year of the Family should serve as a propitious opportunity to strengthen international commitment and complementary measures, especially at the national and local levels.

16. **Ms. Afifi** (Morocco) said that the concept of social development had emerged in the 1960s, at a time when post-decolonization development activities had become a primary concern of the international community. Human beings had, however, been overlooked since the financial institutions and other funding sources had not made them central to their development strategies. Social development questions, including the social situation throughout the world, young people, older persons, disabled persons and the family, were nevertheless still matters of continuing concern and were of great importance to all countries and to the international community. Accordingly, development must be seen in its many macroeconomic dimensions so that human needs and expectations could meet with a more rapid and effective response. A review of the first half of the implementation phase of the Programme of Action of the World Summit for Social Development had revealed a large number of limitations at all levels. Social problems continued to

multiply, and the negative aspects of globalization, the detrimental impact of the international financial crisis on a large part of the world, especially Asia and Latin America, the deterioration of the environment, the violence of structural adjustment measures, the rise in indebtedness, and the proliferation of armed conflicts continued to contribute to a worsening of the socio-economic situation of the developing countries, whose annual demographic growth represented nearly 96 per cent of the global rate. On the other hand, official development assistance, which was the mainstay of the international community's solidarity with the poor, had declined by 40 per cent since 1992 and in 1998 represented barely 0.23 per cent of the GNP of the developed countries, while the international target had been set at 0.7 per cent. All those factors had helped to create vast inequities between rich and poor countries.

17. Africa, a region in constant crisis, was the continent most affected by conflicts, instability, poverty, AIDS and other social and political scourges that had hampered its social development. Of the 33 million persons infected by HIV/AIDS in the world, 22 million resided in Africa south of the Sahara. Furthermore, 44 per cent of Africans and 51 per cent of the inhabitants of Africa south of the Sahara lived in utter poverty. In the face of such obstacles, it was impossible fully to achieve the goals of the World Summit and rectify the deterioration of the social situation of developing countries. However, with the recognition by the rich countries and the international financial institutions of the importance of the social dimension of development, an important step had been taken and priority had been given to social policies at all levels with a view to promoting progress and social justice.

18. The social situation in Morocco was no exception, but with firm political will and by mobilizing all sectors of society, the Government had managed to launch a social policy designed to respond more effectively to human needs, especially by strengthening positive interaction between economic and social policies. In that spirit, the Government had formulated social development and poverty elimination strategies, the goal of which was to increase the access of the poor to basic social services and to combat unemployment, inequities and social exclusion by offering job opportunities, generating income, assisting the most vulnerable sectors and reforming social protection systems. Among the measures adopted, mention should be made of the creation of a social development agency the role of which was to support activities designed to reduce poverty, to reform the basic foodstuffs subsidies programme and to restructure the national assistance institution to provide better care in rural and peri-urban areas.

19. Morocco had undertaken numerous reforms in order to create a favourable environment for the social integration of all vulnerable groups. The State had spared no effort to integrate the needs of the disabled into sectoral policies and programmes and it had recently created a Ministry responsible for that sector of the population. Furthermore, in recent years, various measures had been adopted to benefit older persons, including revision of the legal and financial situation of the pension fund and improvements to their social standing. In 1998, Morocco had hosted the first meeting of the Arab-African Union of Older Persons and, on 1 October 1999, it had celebrated the International Day of Older Persons.

20. The special session of the General Assembly review of the World Summit for Social Development should provide an opportunity for new measures to be adopted and for a more decisive commitment to be made by all those concerned in order to achieve more equitable social development.

21. **Mr. Tekle** (Eritrea) said that, over the past year, many problems had resulted in serious consequences for social development in different parts of the world. Among the most serious had been conflicts, both between and within States, and major economic crises. However, 1999 had also been a year of great hopes and opportunities because it was the International Year of Older Persons, which had had a considerable impact and triggered many national and international initiatives. His delegation believed that the social sector should be given high priority in the development process, since no economic development programme could be meaningful if it did not endeavour to eliminate hunger and illiteracy, provide adequate health services, improve the quality of life, and give due attention to human values.

22. The Government of Eritrea's economic and social policies were based on the conviction that, to be successful, development must emphasize social development. That was underscored in the National Charter of February 1994 and the macro-policy of November 1994, which paid special attention to human resources development and to health, social welfare, and the rehabilitation of war victims and other vulnerable and disadvantaged members of society, especially women, young people and older persons. For that reason, his delegation welcomed the attention that the Committee and other international forums were paying to social issues. In addressing those issues, the people and Government of Eritrea had necessarily borne in mind their own past experience, their current situation and their hopes for the future. The war of independence had involved the entire population and, since it had lasted for 30 years, all age

groups within each family had taken part in it; it was therefore inevitable that it would spawn a society for all ages. Under those circumstances, a dialectic process had been created in which one generation educated the following generation and passed on to it values such as freedom, development based on self-reliance, and work as a means to a dignified and prosperous future.

23. Eritrea's policies and programmes were essentially in consonance with the basic concepts and strategies of the Copenhagen Summit and the various reports of the Secretary-General on social development; for example, the responsibility of children to care for their elders was a principle as sacrosanct as that of the responsibility of parents to care for their children. Both principles were enshrined in article 22, paragraph 3, of the Eritrean Constitution, which also gave an important role to the family in the development and welfare of society and the care of children and older persons. Indeed, the family continued to play the same unifying role that it had played during the war and to be a catalyst for cooperation and development, helping to mitigate many social problems, as society, the Constitution and the National Charter recognized.

24. Young people in Eritrea, who had shouldered a historic responsibility and actively participated in the liberation struggle, now assumed an equal responsibility in the country's defence and reconstruction. The National Youth and Students Association had enabled young people to participate in decision-making on major political, social, economic and cultural programmes throughout the country.

25. Older persons had made an important contribution to both the liberation struggle and the reconstruction of the country in areas such as the rebuilding of the railway system, education and health, and they had been given access to microcredit to carry out agricultural and commercial activities. At the same time, the Government had organized a modest but effective programme to care for those who could not perform any activity. The programme included the establis' ment of residential services, the reintegration of older persons into their extended families and the provision of medical services.

26. To help the disabled to become self-reliant and to reintegrate them into the workforce, the Government of Eritrea had established a community-based rehabilitation programme that opened direct channels to the community by training local facilitators and creating rehabilitation committees in the villages. The programme, in which the communities were already participating actively, would be given further impetus when the draft law on the disabled entered into effect; that laws would allow the Government to create new financial mechanisms to generate income and assist the disabled to establish associations that would allow them to take a more active leadership in advocacy, whether or not they were war veterans.

27. His delegation joined the other delegations that had recognized the devastating effect of conflicts on development and urged the United Nations and the international community to do whatever was necessary to put an end to such conflicts. To that end, it urged the United Nations and the international community to take appropriate measures with regard to those countries which used delaying tactics in an attempt to derail the peace plans that were in place as a result of the efforts of the United Nations and the relevant international organizations.

28. **Mr. Krassowski** (Deputy Director of the Division for Social Policy and Development) noted with interest the proposals and opinions that had been put forward, and also the initiatives of the various countries, the analysis of national and international trends, and the problems encountered by each State. He added that he would ask the Secretariat to programme as many activities and resources as possible to help Member States to implement the resolutions adopted by the General Assembly. Compared to previous years, the discussion, in addition to having been highly productive, had been enriched by the increased participation of youth representatives, including young people from developing countries. As a representative had once said, the work of the Committee was the hardest of all, because it did not consist in merely discussing practical issues, reconciling interests or solving technical problems, but rather in something as basic as deciding what exactly was a society for all and achieving consensus among the different viewpoints of States on a single definition, based on a common concept of humanity.

The meeting rose at 3.50 p.m.

United Nations A/C.3/54/SR.7

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Chairman: Mr. Galuška ..... (Czech Republic)

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* Items which the Committee has decided to consider together.

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99-81538 (E)

The meeting was called to order at 3.10 p.m.

Agenda item 109: Advancement of women (A/54/3, A/54/38/Rev.1, A/54/98, A/54/123-E/1999/66, A/54/124, A/54/156-E/1999/102, A/54/156/Add.1-E/1999/102/Add.1, A/54/224, A/54/225, A/54/341, A/54/342, A/54/352 and A/54/405)

Agenda item 110: Implementation of the outcome of the Fourth World Conference on Women (A/54/124, A/54/264 and A/54/354)

1. **Ms. King** (Special Adviser on Gender Issues and Advancement of Women), introducing the items, welcomed the recent adoption by the General Assembly of the Optional Protocol to the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women on the right to petition, which testified to the commitment of Governments to provide women not only with the legal framework to protect and promote their rights, but also with procedures for translating those rights into reality. While international mechanisms for redress were essential for ensuring the implementation of freely accepted State obligations concerning women's human rights, those mechanisms would always remain subsidiary to national remedies. She believed that the Optional Protocol would inspire Governments to examine currently available domestic remedies for preventing and redressing violations of the rights of women under the Convention. Such action would ultimately create an environment in which women and girls would be able to enjoy all their human rights fully, and their grievances would be addressed with the seriousness and speed they deserved. Universal ratification of the Convention by the year 2000 remained critical; she urged States which had not yet done so to ratify or accede to the Convention as soon as possible.

2. Great efforts had been made by Governments, the United Nations system, non-governmental organizations and other actors of civil society to sustain the momentum generated by the Fourth World Conference on Women, held in Beijing in 1995. Governments had enacted and revised legislation to bring it into line with the Convention, other international and regional human-rights instruments, and the Beijing Platform for Action. Women's access to justice at the national and international levels had improved. Governments had taken steps to ensure that the realities of women's lives were more explicitly addressed in planning and policy-making, particularly with regard to poverty eradication. Non-governmental organizations had become more sophisticated in their advocacy for women's empowerment and equal participation in decision-making at all levels. The United Nations system was placing gender units and focal points in central policy and decision-making positions to enable them to further gender equality.

3. Attention to gender equality concerns had also continued in intergovernmental processes, particularly through the follow-up to global conferences. The Economic and Social Council had made significant progress in studying the links between social exclusion and women's inequality. The ministerial communiqué adopted at the conclusion of the Council's 1999 high-level segment gave clear recognition that progress in the fight against poverty was conditional upon women's empowerment.

4. The link between the persistence of poverty and women's inequality was particularly apparent in rural areas. The General Assembly had a particular responsibility for promoting more effective measures to break the cycle of poverty for rural women and their families. A draft strategy for action was expected to be adopted following the recent high-level consultation on rural women and information organized by the Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations (FAO).

5. The publication by the Division for the Advancement of Women of the *1999 World Survey on the Role of Women in Development* and its consideration by the Second Committee presented a special opportunity to integrate gender equality in all Second Committee issues. The *Survey* examined the gender dimensions of economic development in the context of recent labour market trends around the globe, and, together with *The World's Women: Trends and Statistics 2000*, should provide a series of policy options to Governments and decision makers. She urged the General Assembly to base its consideration of management of the global economy on the information available concerning the impact which gender relations had on a country's capacity for economic adjustment and development. Women's empowerment and gender equality were both means and ends in the fight against poverty.

6. In the search for new means of conflict prevention, it had become clear, over the past few years, that the nature of conflicts had changed: inter-State war had given way to intra-State conflict. One of the most harrowing developments was the large number of child soldiers. Furthermore, women were increasingly the target of hostile action by warring factions unconstrained by international humanitarian and human-rights standards. At the same time, there was a need to recognize women's capabilities and strengths, their role in the community, and their potential for contribution to peacebuilding, conflict resolution and reconstruction of torn societies. Communities needed to be monitored for early signs of tension and social exclusion so that preventive and

remedial measures could be taken. Violations of the rights of women and girls and harmful practices, including trafficking in women and children, needed to be considered for their larger social implications.

7. Limited progress continued to be made on the issue of the status of women in the Secretariat. Although the increase in women's overall representation over the past year had been small, there had been notable progress in the representation of women at the D-1 level. The Secretary-General had issued revised terms of reference of the Steering Committee for the Improvement of the Status of Women in the Secretariat, which had already started its work. Its functions included monitoring the development and implementation of action plans to achieve gender balance. Also of interest was the latest revision of the Special Measures for the Achievement of Gender Equality (ST/AI/1999/9). The appointment of a principal adviser in her office was a welcome development. The Economic and Social Council's agreed conclusions on gender mainstreaming, and on operational activities, together with the guidance provided by the Secretary-General for their implementation, had been decisive factors in the progress made in gender mainstreaming both in the Secretariat and system-wide.

8. With regard to the United Nations International Research and Training Institute for the Advancement of Women (INSTRAW), the activities described in the biennial report of the Director (A/54/352) represented genuine effort on the part of a very small, dedicated staff to work towards fulfilling the mandate of the Institute. An even more pressing issue was the follow-up to Economic and Social Council resolution 1999/54, concerning the revitalization of the Institute. The Special Representative of the Secretary-General for INSTRAW had had a first meeting of donors and other interested parties, including representatives of regional groups and the host country, to get feedback on the preliminary approach proposed by the Secretary-General and developed in collaboration with the Director and members of the Board. The approach focused on creating an Internet-based capacity and involved the establishment of a new system, called the "gender awareness information network system". It was hoped that the General Assembly would make decisions that would enable the Secretary-General, the Board and the Director to start energetically on the new programme. That action would depend almost entirely on the political will of Member States and on the pledges earmarked for INSTRAW at the pledging conference in November. The future of INSTRAW, as one of the three pillars of the work of the United Nations concentrating exclusively on gender issues, was at stake.

9. The Committee on the Elimination of Discrimination against Women, in its report to the preparatory committee for the special session, had identified a series of challenges for implementation of the Platform for Action, many of which were confirmed in the assessments provided by Governments in their replies to the questionnaire on the review and appraisal process. One such challenge, which required concerted efforts, was the persistence of stereotypical attitudes towards the gender roles of women and men, which created a pervasive climate of discrimination and impeded many of the achievements made in other areas of work.

10. **Ms. Heyzer** (Executive Director, United Nations Development Fund for Women (UNIFEM)) said that General Assembly resolutions on women's empowerment and gender equality had strengthened the capacity of UNIFEM to make a difference in women's lives at the country level.

11. As a result of the establishment of a Trust Fund in Support of Action to Eliminate Violence against Women, in accordance with General Assembly resolution 50/166, more than $3 million had been invested in 71 projects in over 40 countries. The initial investment of Governments had enabled UNIFEM to attract nearly $1.5 million from private sources. More than 2,000 individuals and groups from around the world had been participating, for a year, in cyber-learning and partnerships using the Internet to focus on ending gender violence and share strategies, research and legislation.

12. Inter-agency decision-making on Trust Fund projects had stimulated stronger partnerships at the country and regional level, which had led to inter-agency campaigns against gender violence in Africa, Asia and the Pacific, and Latin America and the Caribbean. The results included the signing of the Quito declaration committing law enforcement personnel and the judiciary to uphold the international standards of the Convention and the Inter-American Convention on the Prevention, Punishment and Eradication of Violence against Women, support for women-friendly police stations in Brazil, and measures to ban female genital mutilation in Senegal and to publicize [illegible] violence, especially honour killings, in Jordan. Other United Nations bodies were becoming involved; for example, the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) was investing in women's programmes in various regions.

13. General Assembly resolution 52/94 endorsed the role of UNIFEM in strengthening women's economic capacity and encouraging them to become key economic players in combating the feminization of poverty. That had enabled UNIFEM to take up the issue of economic globalization by

addressing the new challenges and ensuring that women benefited from the new opportunities. Both short-term and longer-term results had been generated that benefited women, their families and their communities. Examples were a women's budget initiative in South Africa, new structures to incorporate a gender perspective into trade agreements in Latin America and the Pacific, technical assistance to women butter producers in Burkina Faso, and support for the movement of women of Zimbabwe into non-traditional and higher-paying occupations.

14. The Committee had encouraged UNIFEM to strengthen its work through the resident coordinator system. That had stimulated collaboration at many levels, which had led to an increase in resources and technical support for country-level activities. They included the placement and support of a rapidly increasing number of gender advisers and gender specialists at the country level, and work through the United Nations Development Group (UNDG) sub-group on gender to identify key areas of intervention.

15. UNIFEM had provided support to the planning and implementation of strategies to develop and operationalize national gender action plans that supported the objectives of the Platform for Action, and had also helped to strengthen the capacity to monitor progress. There were many encouraging signs. It had, for example, signed a memorandum of understanding with Mongolia, the first of its type, to support Government efforts to implement its national plan in support of the Beijing Platform for Action. The challenge was to strengthen implementation and accountability. UNIFEM would do all it could to turn resolutions into realities so that, in partnership with Governments and civil societies, it could continue to make a difference in women's lives at the country level.

16. **Ms. González** (Chairperson of the Committee on the Elimination of Discrimination against Women) welcomed the adoption of the Optional Protocol to the Convention. She urged all States parties to the Convention to ratify or accede to the Optional Protocol so that it could enter into force as soon as possible.

17. During the twenty-first session of the Committee on the Elimination of Discrimination against Women, there had been a solemn commemoration of the twentieth anniversary of the adoption of the Convention, followed by a round table on the impact of the Convention at the domestic level. The twentieth anniversary had also been commemorated by a round table held during the fifty-fifth session of the Commission on Human Rights. Those events had demonstrated that while much progress had been made, particularly with regard to women's equal franchise and participation in public life, much more remained to be done, especially in relation to persisting stereotypical attitudes towards the gender roles of women and men. The Committee on the Elimination of Discrimination against Women had noted, through its review of the reports of States parties, that such attitudes perpetuated traditional practices and customs prejudicial to women such as violence against women, forced marriage, preference for sons, and honour killings, and created a pervasive climate of discrimination.

18. Recalling the objective of universal ratification of the Convention by the year 2000, she called upon the remaining States which had not yet done so to ratify or accede to the Convention as soon as possible, before the special session of the General Assembly in the year 2000.

19. It was encouraging that, although the Convention continued to be subject to a large number of reservations, some of them far-reaching, there had been a response by States parties to the General Assembly's appeal to limit the extent of any reservations they lodged to the Convention, and to review their reservations regularly with a view to withdrawing them. On that basis, the Committee on the Elimination of Discrimination against Women consulted States parties on any reservations to the Convention during the analysis of their reports, and those efforts had led several States parties to withdraw or at least modify their reservations.

20. As of 1 October 1999, only 22 States parties had accepted the amendment to article 20, paragraph 1, of the Convention, which limited the meeting time of the Committee on the Elimination of Discrimination against Women to two weeks annually. She urged all States parties to accept the amendment so that the two-thirds majority required to bring it into effect could be achieved. Following authorization by the General Assembly, the Committee had held two annual sessions since January 1997, which had allowed it to make progress in its work and significantly reduce the number of reports awaiting review. It had reviewed the reports of 48 States parties and formulated concluding comments on them, and had adopted general recommendations on women in public life, and on women and health, in 1997 and 1999 respectively. It had also focused on a number of issues highlighted in its report to the Commission of the Status of Women acting as the preparatory committee for the special session of the General Assembly.

21. In 1999, the Committee on the Elimination of Discrimination against Women had decided to modify its working methods. In particular, it had convened its pre-session working group at the end of the session prior to that

at which reports would be considered, so as to give States parties ample time to prepare full written responses to the lists of issues and questions. The Committee had continued to develop its relationship with specialized agencies, funds and programmes of the United Nations system in accordance with article 22 of the Convention, and with the Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights and human-rights mechanisms, including treaty bodies and rapporteurs. A workshop on gender integration into the human-rights system convened by the Office, the Division for the Advancement of Women and UNIFEM in May 1999 had laid the groundwork for closer cooperation between human-rights treaty bodies and other human-rights mechanisms.

22. Overdue reports were a major concern. As of 1 October 1999, 54 initial reports, 57 second periodic reports, and many other third, fourth and fifth periodic reports had not been submitted. She urged States parties which had not yet done so to submit their initial and periodic reports as soon as possible. In implementation of General Assembly resolution 53/118, a subregional training workshop for States parties had been organized by the Division for the Advancement of Women at Cotonou, Benin, in July 1999, in order to provide technical assistance and guidance on preparing reports, particularly initial reports.

23. **Mr. Hernandez** (Joint Inspection Unit), introducing the report of the Joint Inspection Unit on its evaluation of INSTRAW (A/54/156-E/1999/102 and A/54/156/Add.1-E/1999/102/Add.1), said that the Unit had ascertained that INSTRAW had achieved remarkable success and provided an example to the entire United Nations system of what could be accomplished with the scantest of resources. Closing the Institute as a result of the acute financial crisis it currently faced would reflect very poorly on the commitment of the United Nations to the advancement of women. The survival of the Institute must be secured; the recommendations in the report supported the Institute's continuation.

24. The report recommended that action should be taken to raise the visibility of INSTRAW, to strengthen its fund-raising function, and to urge the Board of Trustees of the Institute to take a more active role in fund-raising at the regional level. He noted with pleasure that an experienced professional had already been appointed Acting Director of the Institute, as had been suggested in recommendation 3 (a) of the report.

25. Like many other institutions in the United Nations system, INSTRAW was required to raise all of its funding from voluntary contributions, and suffered a disadvantage in the competition for funds that had characterized United Nations programming for many years. He called on the United Nations Secretariat to compensate INSTRAW for the inappropriate use of its funds in respect of administrative services, and expressed the hope that Member States would rectify the current unfair situation in which some United Nations research institutes were able to supplement their voluntary funds with subventions from the regular budget while others, including INSTRAW, were denied such an option. Finally, he noted that the Institute's Strategic Plan and Work Programme for 2000-2003 represented a serious attempt to move INSTRAW forward to the next millennium by proposing institutional reforms designed to provide it with a more sustainable financial base.

26. **Mr. Cherif** (Tunisia) said that his delegation regretted the failure of contributions to INSTRAW to reach the levels originally projected, which had impaired the Institute's ability to implement the approved programme of activities for the biennium 1998-1999. He hoped that the upcoming meeting of donors would improve the Institute's financial situation, and supported the Chairman's proposal to keep the agenda item open for further discussion.

27. **Ms. Wremer** (Norway) said that her delegation fully agreed with the Special Adviser's observation that stereotypical attitudes towards the gender roles of women and men created a pervasive climate of discrimination, and asked for her views on how men could and should participate in the elimination of discrimination based on gender.

28. **Ms. de Armas Garcia** (Cuba) said that her delegation wholeheartedly supported the work of INSTRAW, and agreed with Mr. Hernandez on the need for funds from the regular budget to be made available so as to enable the Institute to carry out its mandate.

29. **Ms. Elliott** (Guyana), speaking on behalf of the Group of 77 and China, asked when the relevant report of the Secretary-General under item 109 would be available, and stressed its potential usefulness to the upcoming meeting of donors to INSTRAW.

30. **Ms. King** (Special Adviser on Gender Issues and Advancement of Women) replied that a paper containing estimates of the Institute's current financial situation would be made available prior to the meeting of donors on 18 October 1999. That paper would serve as the framework for the report of the Secretary-General to be distributed following its translation on a priority basis.

31. She also agreed on the need for men to be involved in all aspects of achieving the goal of gender equality, and for them to understand that women's advancement was not a

threat to men, but rather that its achievement would result in the betterment of society as a whole.

32. **Ms. Rasi** (Finland), speaking on behalf of the European Union, the Central and Eastern European countries associated with the European Union (Bulgaria, the Czech Republic, Estonia, Hungary, Latvia, Lithuania, Romania, Slovakia and Slovenia), the associated country Cyprus and, in addition, Iceland, said that the European Community and the States members of the European Union were fully committed to the implementation of the Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action in their national, regional and international policies, including development cooperation. They had prioritized the mainstreaming of a gender perspective in order to translate the objectives of gender equality and non-discrimination into reality in the field of development cooperation, while simultaneously emphasizing positive action for women. The European Union had also paid special attention to such issues as violence against women and women in decision-making, and it recognized the importance of constant dialogue with non-governmental organizations and their role in promoting gender equality in development cooperation.

33. In the light of the need to identify actions to further implement the Beijing commitments, the European Union called on the Secretariat to prepare a forward-looking analytical summary of the national implementation reports submitted by Governments. It would welcome a dialogue on strategies to overcome obstacles to implementation of the Beijing Platform for Action during preparations for the special session, and the latter should endorse a number of those strategies and identify further implementation initiatives. It also welcomed the proposal to allocate time during the current session to bring the process forward.

34. The European Union attached great importance to a close and coordinated follow-up of the recommendations contained in the final document of the 1999 General Assembly special session on Population and Development for strengthening efforts in the areas of maternal mortality and gender equality. Governments, supported by the international community and the United Nations system, bore primary responsibility for creating an enabling environment for development and gender equality, but only coherent and coordinated joint action would enable the United Nations system to assist Governments effectively in that task.

35. The European Union strongly encouraged all States that had not yet done so to ratify or accede to the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women by the year 2000, and was gravely concerned that many States had made reservations incompatible with the purpose of the Convention. Such reservations should be withdrawn as a matter of priority, while any other reservations should be formulated as precisely as possible and in such a way as to ensure that none were contrary to international treaty law. The European Union welcomed the recent adoption of the Optional Protocol to the Convention, and called on all States to give serious consideration to ratifying it as soon as possible.

36. The European Union was working to eliminate all forms of violence against women and girls. It acknowledged the efforts by the Secretariat and UNIFEM in that respect, and welcomed the Secretary-General's report on violence against women migrant workers (A/54/342), whose protection merited special attention. In addition to combating violence against women, the European Union was continuing to implement measures to combat violence against children and young people, and supported the development of international standards in the fight against the traffic in human beings, the majority of whose victims were women and children. The European Union called for immediate measures to help the victims as well as to address root causes and contributing factors. In that regard, it also welcomed the work of the Ad Hoc Committee on the Elaboration of a Convention against Transnational Organized Crime.

37. It was pleased to note that many countries had taken legal measures to eliminate cultural, religious or traditional practices, including female genital mutilation, that violated the human rights of women and girls. Although in keeping with the duty of States to protect all human rights, such actions were insufficient by themselves to end those practices and should be supplemented with education and public awareness campaigns.

38. The European Union welcomed the outcome of the 1999 high-level segment of the Economic and Social Council on the theme of linking employment, work, poverty eradication and the advancement of women. As the majority of people living in poverty were women and children, a gender perspective had to be integrated into poverty-eradication strategies. Women's equal access to control over economic resources and opportunities and their participation in political decision-making, as well as in employment, education and training, health care and other basic social services, must be ensured. Investment in processes that brought about gender equality and ensured equal access to a full enjoyment of rights were essential in the fight against poverty. Furthermore, efforts to reconcile work and family life were needed not only to increase women's participation in the labour market but also to provide a better quality of life for all. In short, the empowerment of women was not

only central to their advancement, but benefited both women and men and the society at large.

39. **Ms. Elliott** (Guyana), speaking on behalf of the Group of 77 and China, said that, in the context of the clear guidance provided by the strategic objectives of the Beijing Platform for Action, the Ministers of that group had addressed the issue of employment and poverty eradication for the empowerment and advancement of women at the 1999 substantive session of the Economic and Social Council. At that session, the Ministers had underscored the importance of mainstreaming a gender perspective in all policies aimed at eradicating poverty and generating employment, emphasized the importance of women's equal access to productive resources and their participation in the planning and implementation of poverty-eradication strategies, and pointed to the need to deal with the continued marginalization of and discrimination against women in the economy.

40. The Group of 77 and China reaffirmed the importance of the goals established at the Beijing Conference, and hoped that the recent deliberations of the Economic and Social Council and of the Commission on the Status of Women would serve as building blocks in preparing for the special session. The Group reiterated its firm support for the Commission's efforts to monitor the situation of women and promote their rights worldwide.

41. Despite some progress, much remained to be done to achieve the goals of the Beijing Conference in the area of health issues affecting women and of institutional mechanisms for the advancement of women. Violence against women persisted; likewise, growing substance abuse among women, the health risks of female genital mutilation, poor health care and the fact that women were twice as likely as men to be infected by HIV/AIDS remained causes for deep concern. The Commission had stressed the importance of education as an impetus for change and of a comprehensive legal framework to address the special needs of female migrant workers and women and children as victims of sexual exploitation and in conflict situations.

42. The Committee on the Elimination of Discrimination against Women would continue to play an important role in monitoring implementation of both the Convention and the Optional Protocol. Moreover, the work of the Office of the Special Adviser on Gender Issues and Advancement of Women and of UNIFEM was commendable, and the Group looked forward to working closely with them.

43. The revitalization of INSTRAW was most welcome. Member States must, however, provide the funds to enable it to overcome its financial difficulties and serve as the primary focal point for research on gender issues. It was thus all the more regrettable that certain reports necessary to discussion of that item had yet to be issued.

44. As demonstrated by the financial crisis in Asia, women were the first to be affected by economic change. The impact of structural adjustment and other economic policies on the lives of women and children was all too often, however, overlooked. Unfavourable terms of trade, inadequate markets for domestic goods and high debt-servicing costs substantially reduced the ability of developing countries to invest in social services vital to women — especially rural women, who bore the brunt of resource shortfalls. Sustained national growth and an enabling international environment were vital. If entrenched attitudes, discriminatory practices and socio-economic obstacles were to be overcome, political will and partnerships between Governments and civil society were essential. Only then might commitments made at Beijing be implemented and the goals of equality, development and peace advanced for women everywhere.

45. **Ms. Bhuiyan** (Bangladesh) said that Bangladesh applauded the recent adoption of the Optional Protocol, which would, in its view, go a long way towards securing women's rights. Her Government's satisfaction was not, however, unqualified. The world community had often demonstrated resolve and political will in making forward-looking commitments, and although some women had benefited, discrimination, denial of rights and marginalization were still the rule. Commitments abounded; what was necessary was compliance through action.

46. Bangladesh commended the Secretary-General for highlighting the plight of women in rural areas, women migrant workers and girls affected by traditional and customary practices, and agreed that the effects of globalization and liberalization, along with declining international cooperation, had resulted in the increased marginalization of rural women throughout the developing world. Since such women lacked information, productive resources and access to credit, they could not respond to the commercialization of agriculture and accompanying changes in economic and social structures. Those global trends had therefore exacerbated poverty in many developing countries. Efforts should be made to invest in the human development of rural women through education, health and nutrition programmes and the provision of safe drinking water; to further the empowerment of rural women by enhancing their participation in rural institutions and all levels of decision-making; to incorporate into national development and poverty-alleviation strategies a gender perspective and a focus on job creation for women in rural areas; to increase the provision of microcredit to rural women and the

development of new microcredit institutions; and to strengthen international cooperation to offset the negative impact of globalization, in particular with reference to rural women.

47. The Secretary-General's report on violence against women migrant workers (A/54/342) had concluded that, although the numbers of women migrant workers had increased in recent years, their plight often went unnoticed. In the view of Bangladesh, the dissemination of information both to sending and to receiving States would help to bring such women out of their subhuman condition. Gender-sensitive legislation was needed in order to address both legal and illegal migration.

48. The special session to review the outcome of the Beijing Conference would provide the opportunity for the world community to undertake actions to ensure peace, equality and development for women. The objective was nothing less than the full implementation of the Beijing Platform for Action. National action plans were central, as was the participation of civil society. But international support and cooperation were critical: resources must be increased, and used in innovative ways. Bangladesh expected to undertake a comprehensive review of its Beijing commitments at the preparatory committee for the special session, with a view to recommending further implementation measures.

49. **Ms. Wremer** (Norway) said that, although the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women was an essential human-rights instrument, only 163 States had ratified or acceded to it; it appeared that universal ratification would not be achieved by 2000. Also regrettable was the large number of reservations entered against that instrument, including some which were incompatible with its purpose. The Convention was nevertheless crucial to empowerment for all women, and had furthered the goal of gender equality throughout the world.

50. Norway warmly welcomed the adoption of the Optional Protocol, which would, in its view, strengthen the international human-rights machinery to take into account the special concerns of women. It intended to be among the first countries to sign the Protocol, and it called on all other States to follow suit. Her delegation also urged Member States to ensure adequate financing and staff support for the Committee on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women, in view of the additional responsibilities that would fall to it.

51. In March 1999, Norway had celebrated the twentieth anniversary of the adoption of the Norwegian Gender Equality Act, which had significantly influenced Norwegian society by introducing the principle that gender equality should be mainstreamed. That Act, which stated that the public authorities should promote gender equality in all sectors of society, was currently undergoing a comprehensive revision. The proposed revision would extend the responsibility for gender equality to all employers and to all employees' and employers' organizations. Stricter legislation would be needed to meet the challenges ahead. The Act had increased women's membership of public boards and committees from 20 to 40 per cent in under twenty years; its terms would soon, it was hoped, also apply to the boards of private and semi-private enterprises.

52. In the view of Norway, the special session should reaffirm but not renegotiate the Beijing Platform for Action. Implementation must be given high priority; that session should therefore assess the extent to which Governments, and the United Nations system, had succeeded in incorporating a gender perspective into policies and programmes. The session would also offer the opportunity to address new issues, as well as those that had changed dramatically in the previous five years, such as the situation of women affected by armed conflict. In modern-day conflicts, the line between the battle front and the home front, and the soldier and the civilian, was vanishing: most victims were now civilians, and largely women. More attention must be paid to the role of women in conflict prevention, in peacekeeping operations and in reconstruction and reconciliation. More knowledge was necessary. The Norwegian Government had therefore commissioned a study on the interrelationship between women and armed conflicts, and was looking forward to working with the Department of Peacekeeping Operations as well as with other interested delegations.

53. Although equal rights and opportunities for women had not yet been achieved, Norway was optimistic: the persistent efforts of individuals and non-governmental organizations were ensuring that women's issues remained high on the agenda. The new millennium required empowered women who saw themselves as leaders.

54. **Ms. Tarr-Whelan** (United States of America) said that, in reaffirming its commitment to the Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action, the world community must emphasize the implementation of a holistic, human-rights based approach to gender equality which recognized that the whole society benefited from women's equality. The five-year review should focus on the essential link between human rights, economic well-being, and the advancement of women and girls. The United Nations had made great strides in implementing that document, including, in

particular, the adoption by the Commission on the Status of Women of the twelve critical areas of concern. The Economic and Social Council had adopted a policy to mainstream gender into all United Nations policies and programmes, addressed the role of operational activities in promoting the participation of women in development, and adopted a ministerial communiqué on employment, poverty alleviation, and the empowerment and advancement of women.

55. Preparations for the special session should take into account the work thus far accomplished to implement the objectives of the Beijing Conference. In the view of the United States, the five-year review should celebrate and reaffirm the goals of the Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action while striving for full implementation of that document, with emphasis on the twelve critical areas of concern. The five-year review should be seen as a milestone for the world community. It should emphasize achievements made thus far; adopt a short visionary declaration reaffirming worldwide commitment to the Platform for Action; identify further actions and initiatives needed to accelerate the implementation of that document; and strive to share lessons learned among all delegations. Governments should send high-level delegations, reflecting the importance of the occasion; representatives of youth and non-governmental organizations should also be included in official delegations. All delegations should make public their Government's commitments or actions to further implement the Platform for Action.

56. Lastly, the five-year review should elicit the views of non-governmental organizations and women throughout the world: accredited non-governmental organizations should be invited to participate, reaffirming their importance and that of civil society in implementing the Platform for Action. In addition, international satellite conferencing would enhance the link with government officials and non-governmental organizations worldwide. Her Government suggested that the following topics might be addressed at the special session: women's leadership and political participation, women's economic empowerment; the role of women in peace-building and conflict resolution; trafficking in women and girls; older women; and HIV/AIDS. The United States also wished to reiterate its interest in undertaking a closer study of the ways in which political will, capacity building, accountability, cooperation and partnership could lead to further implementation of the Platform for Action.

57. Under the leadership of President Clinton's Interagency Council on Women, chaired by Secretary of State Madeleine Albright, with First Lady Hillary Rodham Clinton as honorary co-chair, the Government was conducting a five-year review of its achievements in implementing the Platform for Action. The results would be published in the year 2000 edition of *America's Commitment*. Previous editions, and the Government's response to the United Nations questionnaire, could be found on its Web site. The United States urged all Governments to publish their replies to the questionnaire on the Internet.

58. The Interagency Council on Women was also working with non-governmental organizations, colleges, universities and regional community organizations to convene related outreach events throughout the country, and events had thus far been planned in ten states. Reports generated at those events would be reviewed and used by the United States delegation to the special session. Her Government looked forward to working with other Governments on behalf of equality for women and girls in the century to come.

59. **Ms. Nishitateno** (Japan) said that her Government welcomed the adoption of the Optional Protocol, a milestone in the struggle for women's rights. Despite the strong momentum created by the Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action, many obstacles remained. Japan, having ratified the Convention in 1985, had enacted and revised several laws in accordance with that instrument. The revised employment law, for example, obliged companies to establish sexual-harassment-prevention measures and to provide women with easier access to arbitration mechanisms in such areas as job assignment and promotion. A new, basic law aimed to promote a gender-equal society, in which men and women would share equally in benefits and responsibilities.

60. Laws could not, however, change attitudes; to eliminate de facto discrimination, Governments must disseminate information, raise social awareness and mobilize public opinion. Japan had held a number of meetings in 1999, such as the National Conference on the Creation of a Gender-Equal Society, attended by both government officials and the general public. At the regional level, senior government officials of East and South-East Asian Countries had held their fourth meeting in Tokyo to exchange views on promoting the status of women.

61. The Government had recently begun to address the matter of violence against women, including domestic violence and sex crimes, and had established the Committee on Violence against Women, whose task was to conduct hearings and to compile its findings. Non-governmental organizations, which were likewise actively engaged in that issue, had set up shelters for victims of violence throughout Japan. For progress to be achieved, however, men's role

must be considered as well. Also worthy of note was a video conference prepared by UNIFEM entitled "A World Free of Violence against Women", an innovative approach in which Japan, as one of the Fund's main donors, had been proud to participate.

62. Japan firmly believed that the empowerment of women should be further emphasized in development assistance, and had been working closely on that topic with UNDP and the Japan Women in Development Fund, which was currently supporting 15 projects, including one in Cambodia on micro-finance in rural areas.

63. The special session of the General Assembly should provide a great opportunity for the world community to reaffirm its strong hopes for a gender-equal society. In 1998, the Government had established the National Committee of Japan for Women 2000 to facilitate the exchange of information and cooperation with civil society. As a member of the bureau of the Asian group of the preparatory committee, Japan had endeavoured, together with India, to represent the views of Asia in the preparatory process. Her Government pledged to do its utmost to ensure equality and dignity for women and men alike in the coming millennium.

64. **Mr. Ka** (Senegal) said that Senegal intended to be one of the first 10 Member States to ratify the Optional Protocol. The Senegalese Government attached great importance to follow-up to the Beijing Conference and was actively mainstreaming a gender perspective in all sectors of society. It was assisted to that end by the mass media, the education system and a flourishing women's movement. Institutional and other mechanisms for promoting the advancement of women and the rights of girl children had now been established. Senegal could also report progress in enhancing women's participation in government. Violence against women was also being tackled on a priority basis.

65. The Government was mindful of the crucial role played by rural women, yet such women were particularly affected by population growth, desertification, soil degradation and lack of access to land. Their access — on a par with men — to land, credit facilities, technology, education, health services and remunerated employment must be facilitated. In that connection, the initiatives in support of rural women put forward at the Summit of First Ladies for Peace and Humanitarian Issues, held in Abuja, Nigeria, were most welcome, as were the recommendations of the Secretary-General in document A/52/123-E/1999/66.

66. Senegal's national plan of action sought, *inter alia*, to promote the economic advancement of women, to raise the education level and health of women and girls, to increase their participation in economic and political life and to strengthen mechanisms for financing women's activities.

67. New legislation penalized all violence against women, and efforts were under way to bring the law fully into line with the Convention.

68. Government initiatives in the field of women's rights included promoting women's access to all professions. In decision-making, the numbers of Senegalese women in senior posts had been significantly increased, with women now occupying over 15 per cent of government posts. Women also held senior positions in the judiciary. Civil society was currently helping to elaborate an extensive programme to promote awareness of women's rights; training in that area was also being provided for policy-makers, legislators and law-enforcers.

69. The political will existed to implement the results of the Beijing Conference, but much remained to be done, in particular with regard to the mobilization of resources for ambitious national programmes and better coordination of international efforts. In that connection, the preparatory committee for the special session would need to address a number of issues, including foreign debt, the decline in official development assistance, factors impeding access to foreign markets and weak financial flows to countries in economic and political transition.

70. **Ms. Nicodemos** (Brazil) commended the United Nations on providing leadership on gender issues for over fifty years. The newly adopted Optional Protocol would benefit millions of women whose rights continued to be violated. While continuing to adhere to the goals and strategies of the Beijing Platform for Action, Brazil was concerned that new challenges posed by more recent national and international developments should not be overlooked.

71. Various United Nations organs had played a crucial role in promoting the political, social and economic integration of women, in raising awareness of women's rights and in mainstreaming a gender perspective in all areas. UNIFEM had proved to be a particularly valuable partner. Brazil also attached great importance to the activities of INSTRAW.

72. In Brazil, open dialogue between civil society and the Government had provided a new impetus for human-rights activities. Society now understood the importance of promoting equal opportunities. All forms of discrimination were prohibited under the Constitution; de facto implementation of the law was also being promoted by the Government, with the cooperation of civil society. Of particular note was a national campaign for addressing

domestic and sexual violence. Similar initiatives were being implemented at the local level.

73. Although Brazilian women were entering the labour market in increasing numbers, obstacles to their full participation remained. A joint task force comprising government and trade-union representatives was currently addressing gender discrimination in the workplace. In the area of health, her delegation was pleased to report that infant and maternal mortality had been reduced as a direct result of national follow-up to major world conferences; Brazilian women now enjoyed a life expectancy of 74 years. The girl child had been made a national priority; of particular note was a comprehensive national adolescent health-care programme. In education, it was encouraging, too, that females now accounted for half of national school enrolments.

74. Despite progress, the quest for gender equality was far from over. It was encouraging, however, that women's organizations were collaborating with the Government to that end. The international community, for its part, must continue to press for the removal of all obstacles impeding the advancement of women. It was high time to build truly democratic societies which guaranteed the equal rights and responsibilities of all people.

75. **Ms. de Armas García** (Cuba) said that the situation of women at the threshold of the new millennium continued to be complex, and was particularly tragic in the developing countries, where war, poverty, disease and other fundamental obstacles to the advancement of women were exacerbated by foreign debt, structural-adjustment programmes and the effects of globalization.

76. Women made up 70 per cent of the world's 2 billion poor. While their economic participation had increased by only 4 per cent in twenty years, unemployment was 10 to 40 per cent greater among women than among men. Although women held the most precarious jobs, and carried a greater share of the workload, they earned less than men. The number of peasant women living in poverty had increased by 50 per cent in twenty years. Of the almost one billion illiterate adults in the world, two thirds were women. Women had a lower access to health services than men, and their health was deteriorating from poor nutrition. The economic crisis was undermining the quality of women's everyday lives, and violence against women had risen to alarming levels.

77. The Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action continued to be essential for the advancement of women throughout the world, and the challenges ahead were crucial. The fulfilment of its objectives would require access to resources at the national and international levels. Although the cold war had ended, huge sums were still devoted to the arms race; they should instead be allotted to progress, welfare and development. A new climate of international cooperation was required in order to mobilize resources for education, training and other activities to advance the status of women; such resources should be charged to the United Nations regular budget. Cuba continued to work towards achieving the eradication of all violence against women everywhere, and hoped that universal ratification of the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women would soon be attained.

78. In Cuba, the Declaration and Platform for Action had been widely publicized and discussed ever since its adoption; and in 1997, the Government had formulated a national action plan. Cuban women had organized many events within the framework of the Government's national apparatus for the advancement of women and the implementation of the Convention, in association with the Federation of Cuban Women. It had responded to the United Nations questionnaire, and was committed to the review process. Indeed, through more than 40 years of social transformation, Cuba had proved that, if the political will existed, the situation of women could be radically transformed.

79. In Cuba, women made up over 40 per cent of the labour force, 66 per cent of technicians and higher-education professionals, 30 per cent of senior officials, 27 per cent of deputies to Parliament; 60 per cent of university students and 40 per cent of scientific researchers. In the previous year, virtually all Cuban women had given birth in medical facilities, and the maternal mortality rate was 2.2 per 10,000 deliveries. Infant mortality had fallen to 7.1 per 1,000 live births. Life expectancy for Cuban women surpassed 76 years. The Government was not satisfied, however, and would continue to work towards a greater presence of Cuban women in leadership posts.

80. All those achievements had come about despite the illegal blockade imposed by the United States on Cuba, a blockade which had recently been bolstered by extraterritorial laws that violated the sovereignty of States and contravened international law and the Charter of the United Nations. The blockade caused a shortage of essential medical supplies and foods, severely affecting the lives of Cuban women. The Government had invited the Special Rapporteur on violence against women to visit Cuba in June 1999 to observe the effects of the blockade.

81. **Mr. Larrain** (Chile) said that his Government attached great importance to the Convention on the Elimination of All

Forms of Discrimination against Women, and applauded the adoption of the Optional Protocol, which constituted a significant advance in the protection of women's rights. The road was long, and many challenges lay ahead. Regrettably, situations prejudicial to women continued to arise. Events like those which occurred daily in countries like Afghanistan recalled that the work ahead would not be easy and much remained to be accomplished.

82. Chile had chaired the Regional Conference on the Integration of Women into Latin American Economic and Social Development, and had supported the initiatives contained in the Santiago Consensus. The Bureau was currently preparing for the eighth session, to be held at Lima in February 2000. Its mission was the development of regional proposals for the special session of the General Assembly. With regard to other aspects of the regional plan, his delegation associated itself with the statements made by the delegation of Mexico, speaking on behalf of the Rio Group.

83. On the bilateral front, the Governments of Chile and Argentina had recently agreed to establish cooperation between their respective departments for women's affairs. The Chilean Government in 1991 had established a public entity to promote equal rights and opportunities for women in national development. That body had formulated an equal-opportunities plan, which had become the main tool for implementing the Beijing Platform for Action. The Government had identified education, labour participation, poverty and family as central areas of concern; considerable progress had been made in those areas during the past decade, including the increased participation of women in the work force; a diminution of the still large gap between income earned by male and female heads of households; the virtual disappearance of the gender gap in the provision of formal education (although considerable social and economic differences remained); a diminution of the maternal mortality rate from 0.4 to 0.2 per thousand live births, largely attributable to the universal availability of medical attention at the time of birth; and an increase in the numbers of women in intermediate decision-making posts.

84. In the legal domain, a significant achievement had been the amendment of article 1 of the Constitution, replacing "all men" by "all persons", and of article 19, explicitly stating that men and women were equal before the law. Significant advances had also been made in ensuring the equality of legal rights in the areas of family and labour, including the adoption of the law on family violence, the law recognizing the legal equality of daughters and sons born both in and out of wedlock, and the law governing participation in family earnings and assets, all of which sought to eliminate discrimination and to protect individuals, especially women and children, within the family. Newly enacted laws improved the access of women to employment, enhanced working conditions, prohibited employers from refusing work to pregnant women, and granted special leave to workers whose children were seriously ill.

85. The gender theme held an increasingly important place on the governmental agenda, and significant legal advances had been achieved; at the same time, public opinion had shown a heightened awareness of the situation of women and the need for the Government to incorporate the notion of gender equity in its programmes and policies. The challenge ahead was to continue legal reforms, reinforce changes and promote cultural transformations capable of furthering that process.

86. **Ms. Paterson** (New Zealand) welcomed the adoption of the Optional Protocol, which represented a milestone for the international community. Much, however, remained to be done to implement the Beijing agenda. There was a continuing credibility gap between international legal standards and their de facto implementation. The abuses of women's human rights — in both war and peace — continued unabated, and appeared even to be on the increase. New Zealand urged States which had not yet done so to ratify the Convention.

87. The realization of human rights must be a cornerstone of development. At the regional level, the Asia Pacific Forum of National Human Rights Institutions provided a platform for cooperation on human-rights implementation. New Zealand promoted regional cooperation and capacity-building for women's rights in partnership with non-governmental organizations in the field. The reduction of domestic violence had been made a particular priority. United Nations agencies such as UNIFEM, UNFPA and UNDP had also impacted significantly on the lives of women in the region. New Zealand supported their continuing efforts.

88. The special session should be used to assess Member States' progress towards the goals set at Beijing and to formulate strategies to effect a quantum improvement in women's rights. To that end, the cooperation of civil society was indispensable.

89. Over the past two years, the New Zealand Government had conducted the first comprehensive survey of how New Zealanders used their time. The survey would provide valuable information on the contribution to society and to the economy of women's unpaid work. Such information could be used to improve public-sector policy and programme development in the health, employment and

welfare sectors and for policy advice on population groups such as women, Maori and young people.

90. New Zealand remained concerned at the slow implementation of the plan for the advancement of women in the Secretariat. Despite improved representation of women at a number of levels, the goal of 50/50 gender distribution by the year 2000 would not be met. The Secretary-General and all components of the United Nations system should make urgent efforts to attain that goal.

91. New Zealand supported all efforts by the Secretary-General and United Nations bodies to implement the 1997 agreed conclusions for furthering the strategic objectives identified at Beijing. The efforts of the Inter-Agency Committee on Women and Gender Equality of the Administrative Committee on Coordination were most welcome, as was the work of the Special Adviser on Gender Issues and the Advancement of Women.

92. Strong institutions were also needed at the regional level. In 1999 New Zealand had chaired the forum for Asia Pacific Economic Cooperation (APEC), which had elaborated a framework to ensure that women participated fully in the region's economic prosperity. New Zealand had also hosted a meeting of the APEC-related Women Leaders Network, which had brought together women in business, the rural sector, science and technology, the public sector and non-governmental organizations. Also in 1999, a first-ever meeting of indigenous women exporters had been held in association with the Network, enabling their perspectives to be fed into APEC ministerial meetings.

93. At the special session, the international community must focus on improving the quality of women's lives in all countries through the realization of their rights. New Zealand looked forward to working to that end with partners at all levels.

94. **Mrs. Toe** (Burkina Faso) said that her delegation wished to align itself fully with the statement made by the Group of 77 and China. Burkina Faso was one of the world's poorest countries, with nearly half the population living below the poverty line. Women in Burkina Faso were at the centre of the development debate and played a significant role in the economic, education and agricultural sectors.

95. As part of its efforts to improve living conditions, the Government was seeking to improve access for women and families to credit facilities, to implement legislation guaranteeing women's right to land, to mobilize resources for women's income-generation activities and to improve women's access to technologies for alleviating the burden of domestic chores. Numerous national programmes were also being implemented to further women's human rights, *inter alia* in the development, agricultural and socio-economic fields. The Government's aim was to promote the empowerment of women through improved opportunities and access to economic resources, education and remunerated employment.

96. Burkina Faso remained convinced that a country's development was inextricably linked to the improvement of the status of women. Her Government was committed to fighting poverty, *inter alia* by promoting the education and health of girls, enhancing their participation in the management of natural resources, improving their living conditions, combating violence against women, increasing their participation in decision-making and improving synergy among the relevant mechanisms for advancing the status of women.

97. She expressed her delegation's firm support for the recommendations of the Joint Inspection Unit in its evaluation of INSTRAW (A/54/156-E/1999/102 and A/54/156/Add.1-E/1999/102/Add.1).

98. **Ms. Laski** (United Nations Population Fund (UNFPA)) recalled that Governments had committed themselves to reaffirming the right of women and girls to physical and mental health. Regrettably, insufficient headway had been made in many areas critical to the Beijing Platform for Action. Women and girls continued to suffer the consequences of gender-based violence and discrimination, of harmful traditional practices and of poverty, especially in rural areas. In commemorating the "Day of the Six Billion", it was important to recall the human beings behind the figures. Despite greater wealth than the world had ever seen, one billion people — the greater proportion of whom were women — continued to lack adequate food, secure housing, basic education and health care.

99. According to the latest figures, as many as 350 million women still lacked access to safe methods of family planning, more than half a million women in developing countries died each year in pregnancy and 70,000 lives were lost each year to unsafe abortions. Women constituted nearly two thirds of the world's 960 million illiterate adults and three fifths of the world's poor. They were also especially vulnerable to HIV/AIDS infection. Moreover, half of all new infections involved young people under the age of 25. As many as 50 per cent of all women were subject to gender-based violence, which was endemic to all countries.

100. UNFPA was unrelenting in its efforts to further the health of women and girls through community-based initiatives, *inter alia* in the area of reproductive health and sex education for girls. Whether they lived in rural or urban

areas, or in the midst of conflicts, women must be given access to the necessary information and services. UNFPA also provided legal and other services for abused women and supported HIV/AIDS prevention in over 130 countries. A number of countries, notably Kenya and Uganda, were taking bold steps towards eradicating harmful traditional practices, with the technical support of UNFPA. Indeed, by forming partnerships, listening to local communities and promoting local participation in decisions relating to development activities, much could be accomplished. The Beijing Platform for Action remained a blueprint for implementing strategies to advance the situation of women everywhere.

The meeting rose at 6.15 p.m.

United Nations A/C.3/54/SR.8

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Third Committee

Summary record of the 8th meeting
Held at Headquarters, New York, on Tuesday, 12 October 1999, at 10 a.m.

Chairman: Mr. Galuška ..... (Czech Republic)

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99-81550 (E)

The meeting was called to order at 10.10 a.m.

Agenda item 109: Advancement of women (*continued*) (A/54/3, A/54/38/Rev.1, A/54/98, A/54/123-E/1999/66, A/54/124, A/54/156-E/1999/102, A/54/156/Add.1-E/1999/102/Add.1, A/54/224, A/54/225, A/54/341, A/54/342, A/54/352, A/54/405)

Agenda item 110: Implementation of the outcome of the Fourth World Conference on Women (*continued*) (A/54/124, A/54/264, A/54/354)

1. **Ms. Fritsche** (Liechtenstein) said that the standards set by the United Nations and by other intergovernmental organizations had been critical for the advancement of women in Liechtenstein, and her country had in turn made efforts to contribute to the work of the Organization.

2. Her delegation attached great importance to the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women, which had made a difference in the lives of numerous women worldwide. It was regrettable that the Convention had not yet been universally ratified and that its provisions were not yet fully implemented by all States parties. The Committee on the Elimination of Discrimination against Women (CEDAW), which had always enjoyed the support of her delegation, undoubtedly had an important role to play in that respect.

3. Her Government was aware of the difficult circumstances under which CEDAW had to operate (backlog of reports, too little meeting time, lack of support staff). But it was convinced that not all the blame lay with the system. CEDAW and the States parties must address the issues of lack of discipline and expertise. In any event, the recommendations made by CEDAW, considered as a whole, provided a very useful tool for the further promotion of women's rights.

4. Her Government welcomed the adoption by the General Assembly of the Optional Protocol to the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women and was considering the possibility of signing it on the forthcoming Human Rights Day. The Optional Protocol was a legally sound document, would enhance the relevance of the provisions of the Convention and would serve both an educational and a practical purpose.

5. The year 2000 was a key date in relation to women's issues in three respects: goal for the universal ratification of the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women, goal for 50/50 gender distribution in the Secretariat, and the celebration in June 2000 of the fifth anniversary of the Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action. Although it seemed unlikely that the first two goals would be reached, despite commendable efforts, it was still possible to attain the third objective by producing a concise and action-oriented document giving guidance for implementation of the recommendations made by the Fourth World Conference on Women.

6. **Mr. Kumalo** (South Africa) said that since the formation of the current democratic Government in 1994, South African women had occupied prominent public positions, in particular in Government, where every effort was made to ensure equal representation of men and women at all levels, both in Parliament and in the political parties. His Government was considering a wide-ranging bill designed to prevent discrimination in all areas of society.

7. Yet true gender equality had yet to be achieved in South Africa and the issues before the Committee, gender equality, poverty of rural women, sexual abuse of women and the development of rural women were goals that the Government and the entire country were attempting to meet.

8. Although the Beijing Platform for Action had presented strategies and actions to address the feminization of poverty, that problem continued to grow. It was for that reason therefore that the special session of the General Assembly in June 2000 must have participation at the highest political level.

9. The international community must accept that social ills such as absolute poverty were a collective responsibility. Member States must also embark on socio-economic development programmes and land ownership reform at the national level.

10. Government, business and the international financial institutions must collaborate to study the question of how monetary institutions and systems could redirect funds in a way that would satisfy the basic needs of all people, especially rural people. International debt relief measures must be aimed at assisting countries to provide basic social services to communities living in abject poverty.

11. The report of the Secretary-General on improvement of the situation of women in rural areas (A/54/123-E/1999/66) not only clearly presented the various obstacles faced by rural women but also looked at the problem of globalization and its effect on rural development. His delegation had always maintained that globalization was not merely an economic process but in fact had an impact on society as a whole, the environment and relations between men and women, and that it required, as President Mbeki had argued, deliberate interventions to increase economic

opportunities and raise the standards of living of the many in the world denied their human dignity by poverty.

12. The renaissance of Africa would truly begin when the plight of rural women was addressed. Rural women and girl children had limited access to food, health, education, paid work and land ownership, and their lives were complicated by traditional or customary practices not of their own making. He fully agreed with the report of the Secretary-General, which stated that women must be part of the decision-making structures.

13. In presenting its first country report under the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women (CEDAW), in June 1998, his delegation had specified actions taken to address the needs of rural women: a land reform programme, participation by women in rural development, agriculture, tourism, arts and crafts, and food security programmes. Furthermore, an international workshop of women in irrigation had been planned for 1999. South African women also had access to credit for participation in enterprises of various sizes. Health-care services had been upgraded, and the supply of clean drinking water and electricity had been extended to remote rural areas.

14. **Ms. Šimonović** (Croatia) noted with satisfaction that 20 years after the adoption of the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women, the General Assembly had adopted unanimously the Optional Protocol to that Convention, which would assist CEDAW to make further progress in the protection of the rights of women.

15. The Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action constituted a framework for national and international action aimed at gender equality and the empowerment of women, action to which the United Nations had provided strong impetus. She congratulated both the Commission on the Status of Women and the Economic and Social Council, which had contributed to the advancement of women, the former by adopting since 1996 its agreed conclusions relating to the 12 critical areas of concern as well as resolutions on follow-up to the Platform for Action; and the latter by stressing during the high-level segment of its 1999 substantive session the need to empower women as a prerequisite for poverty eradication and job creation.

16. Violence against women remained one of the outstanding challenges to be addressed. The United Nations had recognized the need to include the gender dimension in peace and security issues. Her delegation concurred with the International Research and Training Institute for the Advancement of Women in stressing the need to develop a common conceptual framework and a methodology for research and networking on the role of women in conflict prevention and conflict resolution.

17. At a time when preparations were being made for the special session of the General Assembly entitled "Women 2000: gender equality, development and peace for the twenty-first century", which was to evaluate the progress made in implementing the objectives of the Beijing Platform for Action, it was also important to agree on further action and initiatives for achieving gender equality.

18. Croatia itself had undertaken preparatory work for the special session. Its progress in implementing the Beijing Platform for Action included the establishment in 1996 of the Government Commission for Issues of Equality and the adoption in 1997 of the National Policy for the Promotion of Equality. Funds for the Commission had been obtained from non-governmental organizations participating in its work, together with which the Commission had organized joint meetings and forums dealing with the status of women. All the debates had confirmed that cooperation between the Government and non-governmental organizations was essential.

19. Croatia's endeavours had come up against a number of obstacles owing to funding difficulties and the lack of quality statistical data, which were necessary for the systematic monitoring of trends and the objective evaluation of results.

20. The insufficient representation of women in the Croatian legislature had led to the convening of a meeting in Zagreb in 1998 to examine the issue. An increase in the number of women parliamentarians was on the agenda of a number of political parties.

21. **Ms. Bouman-Dentener** (Netherlands) said she cherished the dream that in the twenty-first century gender equality would be truly achieved. Currently there was still a long way to go, although many Governments had shown the political will to promote equal participation by women in public life. The number of female government ministers worldwide had more than doubled over the past 10 years. Nevertheless, the global average was still a mere 7 per cent and the difficulties encountered by the United Nations Secretariat itself in achieving a 50/50 gender balance by 2000 were common knowledge. In the Netherlands, 30 per cent of ministerial posts were held by women, but at the executive level, where gender mainstreaming policies were to be translated into practice, women were almost absent. True gender equality implied that women were no longer regarded as a separate group in society but that their views and requirements formed part and parcel of social and

economic development in general. In that regard the agreed conclusions on institutional mechanisms of the Commission on the Status of Women at its forty-third session were important, since they requested Governments to ensure that senior management in each ministry or agency should integrate a gender perspective into all their activities and promote effective monitoring mechanisms.

22. Given that gender equality was an important aspect of sustainable development, the Netherlands women's movement concentrated its efforts on both objectives, in line with the principles contained in Agenda 21. At the Earth Summit in Rio and at the Women's Conference for a Healthy Planet, held in Miami in 1991, women had shown their willingness to take long-term responsibility for the well-being of the planet and to adopt an integrated approach to sustainable development wherein women participated on an equal footing with men and their respective needs were taken into consideration.

23. During the five-year review of the implementation of the Beijing Platform for Action, women would have the opportunity to hold their Governments to account. Even more important, however, was the process of mainstreaming a gender perspective into the reviews of other world conferences and programmes, such as the International Conference on Population and Development and the World Summit for Social Development. Poverty eradication, a main theme of the Summit's Programme of Action, was a prerequisite for sustainable development, and women comprised about 70 per cent of the world's poor.

24. At the second World Water Forum, to be held in The Hague in March 2000, the World Water Council would submit a comprehensive project, which was supported by all the United Nations agencies and the World Bank. Thanks to the efforts of her own Government and two other donors, Sweden and Luxembourg, a gender perspective had been injected into the project. At the national level, the Netherlands women's movement was being given ample support to ensure a gender-balanced approach.

25. Her delegation was closely following the revitalization process of the International Research and Training Institute for the Advancement of Women. It was the intention of her Government — if other donors did likewise — to contribute to the core funding of the Institute's activities.

26. Lastly, her delegation expressed its satisfaction that the General Assembly had in plenary session adopted the Optional Protocol to the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women.

27. **Mr. Ibrahim** (Egypt) said that the States that had participated in the Fourth World Conference on Women had undertaken to expand their efforts to guarantee equality, development and peace for all the world's women in the context of the protection of their fundamental rights. There could therefore be no doubt that the adoption by consensus of the Optional Protocol to the Convention for the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women reflected the will of the international community to improve the status of women and protect their rights. In that connection, the Economic and Social Council had devoted a high-level debate to the question of demarginalization and the promotion of women by eliminating poverty, which would involve, on the one hand, strengthening the process of economic and social development at the national level and, on the other, the emergence of a more just and equitable international environment. In that regard, his delegation considered that the mobilization of resources and respect for all the commitments undertaken, including those by the developing countries, were prerequisites. The demarginalization of women would come about as a result of implementing legislation at the community level in relation to education, health, occupational training, employment and access to basic services, all areas which required material and technical resources from Governments and the international community in accordance with the policy commitments made by the advanced countries. In that regard, his delegation stressed that the International Research and Training Institute for the Advancement of Women should be provided with the financial and human resources needed for its activities.

28. The promotion and demarginalization of women were indispensable to development and social progress. The Egyptian Constitution guaranteed equality for all citizens and forbade any discrimination based on sex, religion, origin or language. Women enjoyed all civil and political rights and occupied the highest posts in all sectors. Aware of the direct relation between health and development, his Government, while guaranteeing the right to health for all women, whatever their age or place of residence, had introduced initiatives and long-term programmes to implement the recommendations of the Beijing Platform for Action. In the education sector, the Government was, as part of its policy to eliminate illiteracy, organizing free courses for women and men. Its efforts had been acknowledged by the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization, which had commended, among others, the measures taken to close the educational gap between girls and boys in both town and country. His delegation attached particular importance to the preparation of the special session of the

General Assembly, which would provide the opportunity not to renegotiate the results of the Fourth World Conference on Women but to translate the international political will into reality through practical work programmes that could advance the implementation of the Conference outcomes.

29. **Mr. Cholil** (Indonesia) said that, although the right of women to equality and the principle of their full enjoyment of the fundamental rights were almost universally accepted, women continued to be denied the effective exercise of those rights, as was evident from wage discrimination, violence against women, and their limited access to education and appropriate health care. His delegation therefore looked forward to the special session of the General Assembly, which would provide an opportunity for a comprehensive review of the implementation of the Beijing Platform for Action, for adoption of decisions on further actions and initiatives, and for an assessment of the impact of the economic events of the past two years in the light of the recent financial crisis and the effects of structural adjustment, and of the benefits of globalization and market liberalization for women. Indonesia reaffirmed the importance which it attached to the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women as an instrument for achieving *de jure* equality for women and de facto respect for their rights. It also looked forward to the implementation of the Optional Protocol adopted recently by the Commission on the Status of Women, which would facilitate the dialogue between States parties and the application of the Convention in a constructive and cooperative spirit.

30. The situation of women in Indonesia had improved considerably in recent years. However, the financial crisis had had a negative impact on employment, especially on vulnerable groups such as women. Yet Indonesia had continued to implement the Beijing Platform for Action, although adjusting its efforts to the current situation, and was committed to mainstreaming gender equality in all its policies and programmes. An increasing number of women were playing activist roles in politics and indeed a woman was a candidate for the Presidency. There was also a plan to establish a women's parliamentary caucus, which ought to have an impact on the work of the next Government. A bill on domestic violence had been drafted with the help of NGOs, which had also contributed to the preparation of a new and more gender-sensitive draft criminal code.

31. Indonesia welcomed the activities of bodies such as the Canadian International Development Agency (CIDA), UNIFEM and UNFPA, which had also contributed to the preparation of the draft plan of action on the elimination of violence against women. A National Commission had been established in 1998 to combat violence against women and it had helped to make national opinion more aware of the problem. In addition, women's studies centres had been set up in the country's universities with a view to helping the Government to determine policies and programmes to correct the gender imbalance. These centres had the support of an NGO Convention Watch, which was carefully evaluating in conjunction with the National Commission the report of the Special Rapporteur on violence against women drawn up following her visit to Indonesia, which had included East Timor.

32. **Mr. Sulaiman** (Syrian Arab Republic) said that women's rights must be promoted by means of education in order to enable them to play their proper role in society. In the Syrian Arab Republic women fully exercised their political, economic and cultural rights, as could be seen from the national report submitted to the Committee on the Elimination of Discrimination against Women. The report had been the subject of a debate which had led to the formulation of a national strategy to support activities and projects for women in the critical areas emphasized in the Beijing Platform for Action. The number of women holding responsible and decision-making posts in all fields continued to increase in the Syrian Arab Republic, and the Government was sparing no effort to provide women with the broadest possible representation.

33. The relevant institutions had continued the reform of legislation applicable to the fundamental rights of women. With regard to the fight against female poverty, the Ministry of Social Affairs and Labour, in cooperation with ILO and UNDP, was carrying out a number of training projects to enable women, including disabled women, to obtain paid jobs. The female active population had thus increased considerably. Women's needs with respect to social and health services were being satisfied, and the proportion of women working in the health sector had also risen substantially. The same was true of the media sector.

34. The Beijing Platform for Action recognized that foreign occupation prevented women from fully exercising their fundamental rights. The Arab women living under Israeli occupation in the Syrian Golan, southern Lebanon and the occupied Palestinian territories were undergoing great suffering, especially as a result of the dispersal of families and other hardships, including the impossibility of exercising their rights to freedom, education, health protection and dignity. The Syrian Government and the human rights organizations were following very closely the developments in the situation of women in those territories. The Syrian Arab Republic welcomed the cooperation with the specialized agencies of the United Nations and the

workshops which they were organizing for the advancement of rural women and their training for productive activities. The social and democratic environment had indeed made it easier to understand the issues of the advancement of women and gender equality, two principles embodied in the Constitution.

35. **Mr. Carranza** (Guatemala) said that it was not the purpose of the special session which the General Assembly was to hold in 2000 to negotiate new agreements or to revise existing ones, but rather to examine and evaluate the progress made in implementing the measures adopted in the 12 critical areas defined in the Beijing Platform for Action and of the new measures and initiatives to overcome the obstacles to the Platform's implementation. It was therefore a matter of effectively translating political will into concrete action so as to attain the Platform's goals. In that connection an early decision must be taken on the form of NGO participation in the special session, since that decision would involve the consideration of substantive questions requiring intensive work. His delegation was glad that the General Assembly had adopted the Optional Protocol to the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women.

36. The political situation of women in Guatemala was characterized by discrimination, which not only harmed women but also obstructed the establishment of a true democracy in the country. The project on women and the legal reforms proposed by the National Women's Office were designed to demonstrate the importance of the participation of women in political life and the machinery by which they could come to hold elective posts. Since the signature of the Peace Agreements the National Women's Forum of the political parties and other women's organizations had made proposals for revision of the electoral law so as to encourage the participation of women in political life on an equal footing with men. Participation quotas had thus been established for women. However, despite the existence of a legal framework favourable to the advancement of women, discrimination persisted in the relations between the sexes. In order to put an end to that situation and guarantee justice and equity for all, the Government was planning to promulgate a law on sexual harassment and violence against women. It was also endeavouring to guarantee women equal access to economic resources and technology, education and comprehensive health services, as well as seeking to increase the female labour force by 30 per cent by 2000. On the basis of the multicultural nature of Guatemalan society the Government had formulated a national policy for the advancement and development of women together with a plan for equality of opportunities for 1999-2001, which were intended to consolidate democracy and contribute to sustainable human development, the full exercise of human rights, and the implementation of the Peace Agreements.

37. **Ms. Tamjidi** (Islamic Republic of Iran) said that her delegation fully supported the statement made by Guyana on behalf of the Group of 77 and China. Despite the scientific and technological progress observable at the close of the century, many economic, social and political problems persisted, which the countries must resolve through constructive cooperation in the spirit of international solidarity. The special session of the General Assembly to be held in June 2000 would provide the international community with the opportunity to address the most serious problems and to give new momentum to international cooperation. In view of the effects of globalization and economic liberalization on the developing world, such cooperation was essential, because the efforts and resources of individual countries would not suffice to realize the goals set forth in the Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action, no matter how committed they might be to implementing the outcome of the Fourth World Conference on Women at the national level.

38. Action on behalf of women's rights should be directed not only to civil and political rights but also to economic, social and cultural rights, particularly the right to development, and must be supported by development policies at the national level and equitable economic exchanges and a favourable economic environment at the international level. Although globalization and liberalization should theoretically generate wealth, in reality the gap between rich and poor countries had grown, and poverty had affected women even more than men. The problem required comprehensive political, macroeconomic, social and legal solutions. The international community must work together to ensure that the global economic situation did not undermine the progress made in the advancement of women and that the social impact of structural-adjustment and contraction policies was not overlooked. In their efforts in that regard, the agencies of the United Nations system must be guided by an appreciation of the complementarity between development activities and initiatives for the advancement of women.

39. In preparation for the special session of the General Assembly, Iran's Centre for Women's Participation had undertaken initiatives to encourage Iranian women, through both governmental agencies and non-governmental organizations, to take part in capacity-building activities, in the elaboration of the national report on women and in

information and coordination workshops for governmental and non-governmental organizations.

40. **Mr. Jovanović** (Observer for the International Committee of the Red Cross (ICRC)) said that in situations of armed conflict humanitarian law accorded women, as civilians, a general protection equal to that enjoyed by men and also provided special protection in keeping with their specific needs, as enshrined in the four Geneva Conventions of 1949 and the two Additional Protocols of 1977.

41. ICRC had repeatedly expressed its condemnation of the practice of rape in armed conflict and was therefore particularly satisfied to note that the international tribunals for the former Yugoslavia and for Rwanda and the Rome Statute of the International Criminal Court considered sexual violence a war crime. That crime had been included in the study presented to the Preparatory Commission for the International Criminal Court regarding the definition of the elements of crimes.

42. International accountability was essential in order to bring an end to such violations and to combat impunity and should inspire similar measures at the national level. However, such violations of women's rights were due less to shortcomings in the laws designed to protect them than to insufficient respect for those laws. It was the responsibility of States to promote and disseminate the norms of humanitarian-law treaties to which they were parties and to prosecute suspected war criminals in their national courts or to extradite them.

43. Humanitarian law recognized the right of families to obtain information regarding the fate of their missing relatives. ICRC therefore urged all States and parties to armed conflict to cooperate in the tracing of missing persons. Since the preservation of the family unit was of crucial importance in times of conflict, ICRC in its day-to-day field activities and in accordance with its protection mandate, took action to maintain or restore contact between separated family members. In those situations, widowed women had often shown exceptional resilience and had in some cases redefined the traditional cultural and social perceptions of widowhood.

44. On the occasion of the twenty-seventh International Conference of the Red Cross and Red Crescent, to be held in Geneva in November 1999, a workshop would be held to identify the ways that programmes of assistance and protection could best take into account the long-term needs of widows for self-sufficiency. The results of the workshop would be included in the ICRC study on women affected by armed conflict, which would be used in developing operational and legal guidelines in consultation with United Nations agencies. ICRC was already working in cooperation with the United Nations in the sub-working group on gender and humanitarian assistance, created in November 1998, in its capacity as standing invitee of the Inter-Agency Standing Committee.

45. **Ms. Martínez** (Ecuador) said that her delegation fully supported the statements made by Guyana on behalf of the Group of 77 and China and by Mexico on behalf of the Rio Group. It welcomed the adoption by the General Assembly of the Optional Protocol to the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women. The Government of Ecuador was now taking the necessary steps to sign the Protocol shortly and hoped that it could enter into force before or no later than the special session of the General Assembly scheduled for June 2000.

46. At the Conference in Beijing, the general problems of girls and women had been addressed. In keeping with the theme of the International Year of Older Persons, "A society for all ages", it was now time to consider more closely the specific needs of women of retirement age obliged to continue working to provide for their relatives, of women 15 to 24 years of age emerging from adolescence but not yet mature, and of handicapped girls and women of all ages. The special session of the General Assembly would offer an opportunity to address those issues and to adopt declarations that would renew the commitment of the Member States to redouble their efforts to build a society free of discrimination, in which each individual could develop his or her potential.

47. At the request of the Committee on the Elimination of Discrimination against Women, the National Council for Women of Ecuador, in cooperation with organizations of civil society and Ecuadorean women's organizations, and pursuant to article 18 of the Convention had prepared its fourth and fifth combined reports which it would soon be submitting to the Division for the Advancement of Women.

48. Her delegation commended the Secretariat on the quality of the reports submitted to the Third Committee, and especially the report of the Secretary-General on the improvement of the situation of women in rural areas (A/54/123-E/1999/66), which contained valuable information on the situation of such women, particularly in the developing countries. Her delegation shared the Secretary-General's views that it was important to strengthen programmes and policies to meet the basic needs of women, and supported the recommendations in the report. The Ecuadorean Minister for Agriculture and Livestock had issued a ministerial decree on 3 June 1996 to set up a national division for rural women, youth and families which

would be responsible for raising public awareness of the work of women, to provide access to training and technical assistance and to facilitate their participation in political life at the local, regional and national levels.

49. She also commended the Secretary-General's report on the follow-up to the Fourth World Conference on Women and full implementation of the Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action (A/54/264), which provided updated information on action by intergovernmental bodies, the United Nations system and non-governmental organizations. At the fourth meeting of governmental bodies and national agencies in Latin America and the Caribbean on women, held in San José, Costa Rica, in June 1999, the countries of the region had reviewed their strategies for assessment and follow-up of the Beijing Platform for Action and the commitments made.

50. **Mrs. Aponte De Zacklin** (Venezuela), speaking on agenda item 109, said that her delegation associated itself with the statements made by Guyana on behalf of the Group of 77 and China and by Mexico on behalf of the Rio Group.

51. She paid tribute to the activities of the Office of the Special Adviser to the Secretary-General on Gender Issues and Advancement of Women and the United Nations Development Fund for Women (UNIFEM) — which were working towards mainstreaming a gender perspective into the activities of all United Nations agencies and which strongly supported the struggle of the Latin American women's movements against violence — and also of the International Research and Training Institute for the Advancement of Women (INSTRAW), and welcomed the General Assembly's adoption of the Optional Protocol to the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women.

52. In 1998, the Venezuelan Women's Council, together with other public bodies and non-governmental organizations, had drafted a five-year action plan that was in line with the objectives of the Beijing Conference and consisted of several components.

53. One component was concerned with access to power, and aimed to help women to exercise their citizenship and participate more in public affairs at all levels, through training workshops and reform of the law on the right to vote. Another part, relating to education, aimed to provide all women with the opportunity to achieve equality with men in education, by means of a project entitled "Education for equality", which aimed to teach in schools the methods for preventing gender discrimination and to enable pregnant adolescents to continue or return to their studies. Another component, on poverty, emphasized rural and indigenous women, who had been particularly neglected since the beginning of the 1980s, and provided for the adoption at local and regional levels of intersectoral and participatory measures in their favour, and, more generally, the integration of a gender perspective in all areas and at all stages of national production. Yet another component was concerned with violence in the home and sexual violence, both as public-health problems and social problems, and had led to the adoption of measures to prevent, curb and eliminate them, such as the law on violence to women and the family of 3 September 1998, which protected women and other family members from abuse. Training courses were being organized for officials who had to deal with problems of violence and agreements to allow assistance to the victims of abuse had been signed with the local authorities.

54. **Ms. Arias** (Peru) recalled that the Fourth World Conference on women had recognized the need to link women's empowerment and gender equality to the elimination of poverty, and that unequal or insufficient access for women to education and health care, violence against women and their marginalization in decision-making would hinder the development of society as a whole.

55. In Peru, the recommendations of the Beijing Conference had given rise to the creation in October 1996 of the Ministry for the Promotion for Women and Human Development, which aimed to bring about a widespread cultural change which would enable women and men to enjoy the same opportunities in an atmosphere of peace, democracy and solidarity. Since then, an important political and legal process aiming to provide Peruvian women with the necessary tools to participate in a more equitable manner in the country's development had been launched. In addition, various legal provisions to curb violence in the home, to give women access to employment and education, and to establish a quota of 25 per cent for women on the lists of candidates for the National Congress had been instituted. One result had been the repeal of article 178 of the Peruvian Penal Code, under which a rapist or accomplice to a rape could atone for his crime by marrying the victim, and another had been the opportunity for women to enter the schools for officers and non-commissioned officers in the armed forces. Institutional mechanisms had also been established (Defence Committee for Women, Children and Adolescents; Commission for Women, Human Development and Sport; etc.) for the purpose of proposing measures to achieve the objectives of gender equality and non-discrimination against women and to follow up their implementation. Finally, 40 per cent of the national budget would henceforth be devoted to social expenditure and particularly to the national policy for gender equality, which was indicative of the progress made in Peru

in recent years. Although the action taken to advance women in Peru was still insufficient, it reflected a firm resolve to improve their position.

56. The holding of the special session of the General Assembly in June 2000 had triggered a process in Peru that could not be halted and that the Government intended to continue in order to overcome any obstacles to attaining the objectives of the Beijing Conference.

57. Merely implementing the recommendations of important conferences, and specifically the Beijing Conference, would not suffice; further efforts should be made to strengthen what had been gained. The progress made in the implementation of national policies to advance women over the past five years should encourage the international community to give priority to that task.

58. In conclusion, her delegation emphasized the importance of the General Assembly's adoption of the Optional Protocol to the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women, and eagerly looked forward to its entry into force.

The meeting rose at noon.

United Nations A/C.3/54/SR.9

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Chairman: Mrs. Martínez (Vice-Chairperson) ..... (Ecuador)

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* Items which the Committee has decided to consider together.

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99-81568 (E)

In the absence of Mr. Galuška (Czech Republic), Mrs. Martinez (Ecuador), Vice-Chairperson, took the Chair.

The meeting was called to order at 3.15 p.m.

Agenda item 109: Advancement of women (*continued*) (A/54/3, 38/Rev.1(Suppl.), 98, A/54/123-E/1999/66, A/54/124, A/54/156-E/1999/102, A/54/156/Add.1-E/1999/102/Add.1, A/54/224, 225, 341, 342, 352, 405)

Agenda item 110: Implementation of the outcome of the Fourth World Conference on Women (*continued*) (A/54/124, 264, 354)

1. **Ms. Vienravi** (Thailand) emphasized the long-standing contribution of women to Thailand's development. While Thai women had assumed new roles and responsibilities in modern-day society, including enhanced participation in the political and economic fields, women in Thailand remained under-represented. It was her Government's aspiration to forge a solid partnership between men and women with a view to creating a society conducive to the realization of individual potential regardless of gender.

2. Thailand was a party to the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women and the Convention on the Political Rights of Women and wholeheartedly welcomed the adoption of the Optional Protocol, which it hoped to sign on Human Rights Day (10 December).

3. Her Government attached particular importance to national and regional efforts to combat the trafficking in women and children. The Office of the National Commission on Women's Affairs (ONCWA) coordinated efforts in that endeavour in cooperation with non-governmental organizations and the international community. Her delegation was pleased to announce that recently promulgated legislation criminalized traffickers while acknowledging trafficked persons as victims. Moreover, as part of follow-up to the World Congress against Commercial Sexual Exploitation of Children held in Stockholm in 1996, ONCWA had established the competent institutional mechanisms and drafted a rule of procedure to serve as a standard in the treatment of victims by government authorities and non-governmental organizations. A memorandum of understanding was currently being drafted to foster cross-border cooperation on the issue between Thailand and Cambodia; it was to be hoped that such cooperation would be expanded throughout the region.

4. The region was working towards full implementation of relevant international instruments concerning women and children and was intensifying efforts to enhance the capacity of disadvantaged women to participate in the labour market on an equal basis.

5. Thailand was committed to cooperating with the international community in the advancement of women and was in favour of building upon the foundations laid out at the Fourth World Conference on Women. In that connection, Thailand supported consideration of the twelve critical areas of concern contained in the Beijing Platform for Action, as well as consideration of the four cross-cutting themes proposed for further action. Her delegation considered the theme of "human security and social protection" to be particularly relevant to the item.

6. **Ms. Ahmed** (Sudan) said that the advancement of women could best be achieved within a comprehensive framework tailored to suit each country's special characteristics. The principle of justice guided the Sudan's policy; accordingly, Sudanese women played an effective role in all aspects of life, and, given access to education and training, enjoyed equality with men with regard to work, pay and political participation. Women's rights and responsibilities were fully recognized in the current 10-year comprehensive national strategy, and the Permanent Constitution of 1998 affirmed that all Sudanese people were equal with regard to rights and responsibilities.

7. The Sudan had been one of the first States to respond to the recommendations made by the world conferences on women, and had established women's units in the relevant ministries and in all administrative districts. Her country was making every effort to implement the relevant General Assembly resolutions and the outcome of the Beijing Conference. An increasing number of non-governmental organizations, and, in particular, women's organizations, played an important part in the eradication of illiteracy and of harmful customary practices, the alleviation of poverty, and in the provision of care for children, families, and vulnerable sectors of society, including the disabled and elderly.

8. However, the lack of foreign cooperation, the inadequacy of social services and the lack of infrastructure in the areas affected by the war in the south made it difficult for the Sudan to implement women-related programmes. More than 3 million people, of whom 70 per cent were women and children, had been displaced in the south. Furthermore, the United States attack on the Al-Shifa pharmaceutical factory in August 1998 had deprived women and children of many vital medicines. The unjustified use of force against civilian targets and, in particular, against those that supplied the basic needs of women and children,

was a flagrant violation of international law. It also violated such human rights as the right to life and health.

9. The outcome of the Beijing Conference was the first step towards empowering women in all sectors of society. In view of the forthcoming special session of the General Assembly, it was important to review and evaluate that outcome and to deal with the problems that were obstructing its implementation, in developing countries in particular. Donor countries must honour their obligations with respect to official development aid, reduction of the debt burden and strengthening the partnership between North and South.

10. **Mr. Valdivieso** (Colombia) said that, on the basis of the Convention and of the Optional Protocol, and with the involvement of Governments, civil society, and regional and international organizations at the special session of the General Assembly, it should be possible to identify the way forward towards complete gender equality in the new millennium.

11. Colombia had made significant progress in the advancement of women and gender equality, but much remained to be done. In 1999, it had submitted its fourth periodic report to the Committee on the Elimination of Discrimination against Women. The recommendations made by that Committee drew attention to some shortcomings which needed to be overcome, but also provided support to Colombia. His delegation recommended that countries which had not yet done so should endeavour to submit their periodic reports in the interest of accelerating progress towards the agreed goals.

12. His Government was deeply concerned about the situation of women in rural areas. The report of the Secretary-General (A/54/123) showed that rural women tended to be discriminated against in terms of access to resources and services, and, despite their enormous contribution to agricultural production, were becoming increasingly impoverished. The deteriorating situation of rural women was closely linked with accelerated globalization, the growing interdependence of States, and the new priorities which they demanded of Governments. Colombia had made a commitment to building gender equality beginning at the rural level. In the long term, it would be necessary to ensure a sustainable development model, combining social justice, redistribution of resources and gender equality.

13. His Government acknowledged the work carried out by the United Nations International Research and Training Institute for the Advancement of Women (INSTRAW) and supported the efforts to strengthen it financially and consolidate it administratively. It was not possible to abandon an institution which, in its 20 years of work, had amply demonstrated the need to promote and carry out research and training activities in specific areas for the purpose of improving the status of women throughout the world.

14. **Ms. Al-Nadari** (Yemen) said that her delegation supported the statement on agenda items 109 and 110 made on behalf of the Group of 77 and China by the representative of Kenya.

15. Her country was making every effort to advance the situation of women and to bring about gender equality. The legislation enacted with a view to strengthening women's position and opening up opportunities had made a significant difference: women had the right to education and to work, and their right to participate in politics was guaranteed by the Constitution.

16. The first five-year plan for economic and social development addressed women's situation and aimed to increase their participation in economic and social activities by increasing the number of female students and reducing the primary school drop-out rate among girls; eradicating illiteracy, in particular amongst girls and women, guaranteeing women the right to work, to equal employment and to training and providing support for women-related projects. Those measures would go a long way towards increasing women's involvement in public life and the decision-making process.

17. The goals of the National Strategy for Women, developed by the National Women's Council and adopted by the Government included eradicating poverty, providing material opportunities for rural and urban women so that they could set up production and commercial cooperatives and strengthening the role of women in the family.

18. Women and development was an important part of the programme of work for the period 1996-2000, which focused on improving women's ability to participate in decision-making at all levels. The programme aimed to achieve equality at all levels while observing the precepts of the Islamic Shariah, to provide family health care and contraception and to extend the provision of social services. A large number of projects and funds had been set up by the Government and by non-governmental organizations with a view to achieving those aims.

19. Her country affirmed its commitment to the outcome of the Fourth World Conference on Women and was giving priority to its objectives. Every effort was being made to strengthen the position of women in the family and in society.

20. **Ms. Yuan Xiaoying** (China) said that it was to be regretted that the critical objectives of the Beijing Platform for Action had yet to be achieved. Indeed, the feminization of poverty had only been exacerbated and the challenges facing the international community were as formidable as ever. The Chinese Government, for its part, had been mainstreaming a gender perspective into all State policies and programmes as part of concerted efforts to honour its commitments and build mechanisms for the advancement of women. The de facto and *de jure* protection of women's interests had been further strengthened.

21. The reform of China had resulted in making women more aware of their equal rights and enhancing their participation, *inter alia*, in the political, economic and social fields. Thanks to long-standing efforts to raise public awareness of legal tools, people now had a better understanding of gender equality and the traditional notion of male superiority was increasingly being discarded. Also on a positive note, women's levels of education had risen and growing numbers were entering an increasing diversity of professions. The proportion of women scientists had increased from 31.6 per cent in 1983 to 38 per cent in 1997 and women's participation in management and decision-making had also grown. Recent industrial structural adjustment had, however, caused some workers, particularly women, to leave their posts. Concerned to protect the right to employment, especially of women workers, the Government had responded by launching a re-employment project.

22. It was the view of the Chinese delegation that the Special Session of the General Assembly on Women should be devoted not to a renegotiation of issues but to a comprehensive appraisal of progress achieved and of factors impeding implementation of the twelve critical areas identified in the Beijing Platform for Action. The Chinese Government remained committed to the early realization of the common goal of equality, development and peace. The newly adopted Optional Protocol to the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women would prove a valuable tool for protecting women's rights and interests.

23. **Ms. Boyko** (Ukraine) expressed appreciation of the work of the Office of the Special Adviser on Gender Issues and Advancement of Women. Further action was needed on the part of the international community if the rights of women as an integral and indivisible part of human rights were to be fully respected. The Commission on the Status of Women continued to play an essential role in monitoring implementation of the Platform for Action. The full implementation of the provisions of the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women should be prioritized at all levels and the adoption of the Optional Protocol was most welcome.

24. In the Ukraine, the State Committee for Family and Youth Affairs of Ukraine constituted an effective mechanism for studying the social status of women and elaborating policy proposals for implementation at municipal and district levels. The Ukrainian Government had, *inter alia*, adopted as priorities the promotion of women's economic rights, the enhancement of women's participation in government, reproductive health and safe motherhood and the eradication of violence against women, which was a critical area of concern. Trafficking in women and girls was criminalized under Ukrainian law and attempts were currently under way to address the issue at a regional level, with the cooperation of non-governmental organizations. Internationally, the Global Programme against Trafficking in Human Beings elaborated by the Centre for International Crime Prevention and the United Nations Interregional Crime and Justice Research Institute had the potential to help the international community better respond to the worldwide problems of smuggling of migrants and trafficking in women.

25. The growing feminization of poverty had recently become a significant problem in countries in transition. Women's poverty was further exacerbated by the persistence of rigid gender stereotypes, by women's limited access to power, education and training and by the growing insecurity of families. Solutions of those problems must incorporate women into the decision-making process and the gender perspective must be mainstreamed in both national and international poverty eradication efforts.

26. The myth that women were incapable of performing complex professional or managerial functions had been abolished and the new distribution of labour between the sexes, whether at home or in the workplace, was making parity democracy a reality.

27. **Ms. Enkhtsetseg** (Mongolia) commented that 1999 had been of particular importance to the promotion of women's human rights. For its part, Mongolia had been among the first to become a party to the CEDAW Convention, welcomed adoption of the Optional Protocol and had been actively cooperating with the Committee in its implementation.

28. Through its national plan of action, Mongolia was working to ensure the equitable participation of women in society. The joint signing with the United Nations Development Fund for Women (UNIFEM) of a Memorandum of understanding to economically and politically empower women of Mongolia into the twenty-

first century had laid a solid foundation for partnership with the Fund.

29. Despite progress made by the Government in addressing women's issues, the impact of economic transition had created new obstacles to the achievement of equality. Women had been particularly affected by the disruption of production and social services and had not shared equally in the benefits of privatization. Women also tended to be the first to lose their jobs in both the State and private sectors.

30. The Memorandum of Understanding signed with UNIFEM had identified a number of strategic objectives, including the improvement of national machinery dealing with women's issues to include the participation of non-governmental organizations and local government; the economic empowerment of women; the improvement of the situation of rural women, *inter alia*, through training and access to social and health services; increased participation of women in management and decision-making; the *de jure* and de facto protection of the human rights of women; measures to combat violence against women; improved access of women to information, technology and communications; and support for women's organizations working on a range of issues including alcohol abuse, prostitution, poverty and unemployment. Collaboration with UNIFEM would also involve the development of relevant indicators and capacity-building to mobilize resources and provide market access to women entrepreneurs.

31. Her Government had also collaborated with the International Research and Training Institute for the Advancement of Women (INSTRAW) in the convening of a national training seminar on sex-disaggregated data and the use of statistics and indicators in policy design, which had been the first of its kind in Mongolia. The seminar had succeeded in alerting producers of statistics to the specific needs of the various users. Her delegation wished to support calls for the revitalization of INSTRAW so that it might continue to serve as a primary focal point for research on gender issues.

32. **Ms. Brobbey** (Ghana) said that while much had been achieved in advancing the status of women through the implementation of the Beijing Platform for Action, discrimination and violence against women and girls persisted. Although several countries had outlawed traditional practices affecting the health of women, those practices still continued, in particular female genital mutilation, which some societies regarded as an initiation rite. After outlawing the practice in 1996 among the few ethnic groups that still upheld it, Ghana had realized that only intensive dissemination of information about the negative impact of that practice on the health of women and girls could guarantee its total elimination. Recourse to court decisions should be a last resort.

33. Ghana urged States which had not yet ratified the Convention to do so without delay and to submit their initial reports as soon as possible so as to demonstrate their commitment to making women and girls full partners in development in the next millennium.

34. Her delegation welcomed the adoption of the Optional Protocol and hoped that it would help curb violence and discrimination against women in their everyday lives. To be effective, however, the Optional Protocol needed to be translated into various languages, and stakeholders, particularly women's advocacy groups, must give it the widest publicity.

35. The progress made in improving the status of women in the United Nations Secretariat still fell short of the goal of attaining 50/50 gender distribution of staff by the year 2000. Member States needed to assist the Secretary-General by encouraging women from their countries to apply for positions in the Secretariat, particularly at the Professional and higher levels.

36. If the international community was to make any impact on the plight of rural women, it must heed the call for equity in international trade regimes and ensure that the process of globalization benefited all countries. That would enable Governments to mobilize adequate resources for the implementation of poverty eradication programmes and the economic empowerment of rural women. Her delegation supported the recommendations in the report on the improvement of the situation of women in rural areas (A/54/123) and also the activities of the United Nations Development Fund for Women (UNIFEM).

37. Her Government had done much to protect women's rights. It had banned traditional practices that affected the health of women or violated their human rights, fixed the marriageable age at 18 years and amended the Criminal Code to ensure the protection of the rights of women and children, and passed a customary and divorce law to provide one standard form of inheritance and to correct injustices suffered by women and children under customary laws.

38. **Mr. Rabola** (International Federation of Red Cross and Red Crescent Societies) said that the International Federation was committed to integrating a gender perspective in all its programmes including disaster response, disaster preparedness and the provision of community-based health services.

39. In 1999, the General Assembly of the International Federation would be reviewing a draft policy on gender equality with a view to ensuring that the social differences between men and women were taken into account in all Red Cross and Red Crescent activities worldwide, that all programmes benefited men and women equally and that men and women at all levels had equal input and equal participation. National Red Cross and Red Crescent Societies were also encouraged to implement projects to assist special groups of men or women, if local situations so required.

40. As of September 1999, there were more than 50 focal points on gender issues in the national societies and in regional and country delegations; their role was to raise awareness of the importance of considering gender issues in daily work and to apply gender analysis in programming.

41. The International Federation was currently focusing on the identification of good practices to demonstrate how the efficiency of its disaster relief and other programmes could be improved by considering gender issues. In July 1999, the first case study had been published, regarding the experience of the Bangladesh Red Crescent Society in recruiting female volunteers in its disaster management programme.

42. The International Federation welcomed the initiative of the United Nations to include gender analysis in humanitarian activities and policies and, in particular, the establishment of a special working group on the subject by the Inter-Agency Standing Committee. The International Federation was planning to develop guidelines on how to integrate gender concerns into its natural disaster relief operations and would continue to work closely with United Nations agencies to build on existing efforts.

43. In 1998 the executive management group of the International Federation's secretariat had set up a working group to review the situation of women in the secretariat and in the field; it had found that gender distribution at different levels of the organization was still markedly disproportionate. All hiring managers had been made primarily responsible for achieving a better gender balance in their respective departments, services and delegations. It should be noted, however, that in many parts of the world, women occupied top executive positions in the organization, and also that of the millions of people assisted by the International Federation, a large proportion were women.

44. Ms. Valdivieso (World Bank) said that the World Bank had found that mainstreaming gender was essential not only to lending sectors such as health, education and agriculture and rural development, but also in non-traditional sectors such as infrastructure and finance. In order to strengthen the impact on poverty reduction, it was taking steps to make gender an integral part of the comprehensive development framework, in collaboration with the United Nations Development Assistance Framework (UNDAF).

45. The World Bank had made substantial progress in bringing gender expertise and perspectives into its institutional structure. Over the past two years, gender policies and programmes had been guided by a Gender Sector Board. Consultations on gender policies and programmes had been institutionalized through the external gender consultative group established in 1996.

46. The World Bank was currently preparing a policy research report on gender and development, which would examine the links between gender, policy and development, and a gender sector strategy paper which would propose institutional and operational priorities for future work.

47. The World Bank had found it highly beneficial to include gender in the policy dialogue with Governments and was increasingly integrating gender into its work on country assistance strategies. In developing a comprehensive development framework, the World Bank had found that the participation of women in strategic consultations could make a major difference in strengthening the agenda, building national ownership and overcoming gender disparities.

48. The World Bank's lending programme reflected continuing attention to gender. In the 1999 fiscal year, there had been significant gender action in two thirds of the operations in population, health and nutrition, and nearly half the operations in agriculture and rural development, social protection and education.

49. The World Bank's partnership with other donors to address women's access to financial services through the consultative group to assist the poor had made substantial progress in assisting microfinance institutions that provided financial services to the poor. In addition, the World Bank was promoting better access to financial services through its regular lending programme.

50. Gender training was becoming increasingly important. The World Bank's Gender Web Page was linked to other key gender sites on the Web, and the newly established *Genderstats* provided indicators on gender and development and sex-disaggregated data for social and economic indicators.

51. The World Bank was making efforts to identify best practice in mainstreaming gender in sector-wide investment and assistance programmes in collaboration with a number of donors. It placed special emphasis on the evaluation of

gender in its activities, and was undertaking an overall evaluation of mainstreaming gender in the work of the Bank and its impact on client countries, to be completed in June 2001.

52. The World Development Report on Poverty and Development, which would appear in 2000, was integrating gender throughout its central analysis, and it was proposed that the World Development Report 2004 should be devoted in its entirety to gender.

53. **The Chairman** announced that with the accession of Tuvalu to the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women, there were now 164 States parties to the Convention. She hoped that ratification of the Convention would be achieved as soon as possible.

The meeting rose at 4.40 p.m.

United Nations A/C.3/54/SR.10

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Third Committee

Summary record of the 10th meeting
Held at Headquarters, New York, on Wednesday, 13 October 1999, at 10 a.m.

Chairman: Mr. Galuška ..... (Czech Republic)

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The meeting was called to order at 10.10 a.m.

Agenda item 109: Advancement of women (*continued*) (A/54/3, A/54/38/Rev.1, A/54/98, A/54/123-E/1999/66, A/54/124, A/54/156-E/1999/102, A/54/156/Add.1-E/1999/102/Add.1, A/54/224, A/54/225, A/54/341, A/54/342, A/54/352 and A/54/405)

Agenda item 110: Implementation of the outcome of the Fourth World Conference on Women (*continued*) (A/54/124, A/54/264 and A/54/354)

1. **Ms. Arnon** (Israel) said that, as a country of immigrants, Israel had to deal with special problems relating to the advancement of women since women from different societies did not make the same demands or have the same needs as they struggled to integrate into Israeli society.

2. Despite that obstacle, Israeli women had made significant progress. Legislation to ensure gender equality had been adopted, including the Women's Equal Rights Laws of 1951 and the Equal Employment Opportunities Law of 1988. The latter, which prohibited discrimination in the workplace on the basis of gender, sexual orientation, marital status, race, religion, nationality, country of birth or political or other orientation, also contained provisions requiring the adoption of protective measures for women with children and prohibiting sexual harassment in the workplace, as a form of discrimination subject to civil and criminal sanctions.

3. In 1998, the Israeli Parliament, after a long legal process, had adopted new legislation intended to advance women's status, prevent violence against women and give the Government the necessary means to those ends. The first step in implementation of that legislation had been the establishment in March 1998 of the Authority for the Advancement of the Status of Women, which was composed of representatives of various ministries, non-governmental organizations (NGOs) and academic experts and whose policies, once approved by the Government, were binding on all government offices. The Authority supervised governmental adherence to its policies and dealt with complaints lodged with it; thus, it provided assistance to working women and encouraged the appointment of women to decision-making posts. Recently, public outcry at the light sentences imposed on men convicted of violence against women had led to the adoption in early 1999 of legislation mandating minimum sentences in such cases.

4. In addition to those legislative measures, other steps had been taken to assist the victims of sexual violence: a recent amendment to the Penal Code acknowledged a woman's right to defend herself against her attacker and broadened the definition of self-defence; the National Health Law provided coverage of any and all medical expenses incurred by women as a result of sexual or physical abuse; 12 shelters for battered women had been established throughout the country, and help centres provided 24-hour emergency hotlines and individual and group legal services. Lastly, the Prevention of Sexual Harassment Law, enacted in 1998, was one of the most advanced in its field; it addressed all forms of harassment (written, oral, physical and even through the computer) in many situations of authority and dependence.

5. The continuing dire condition of women in several developing countries, particularly in terms of equal access to education, vocational training and employment, required a radical change in attitudes towards women. The Golda Meir Mount Carmel International Training Centre in Haifa played an important role in that regard. It held practical training courses and workshops throughout the year for participants from all countries, particularly developing ones. To date, over 7,000 trainees had taken part in those programmes. Over the years, the Centre had expanded its activities, focusing on human resource development, in accordance with the Programme of Action of the International Conference on Population and Development. During the past five years, for example, it had offered courses on issues such as "women and microenterprises" and "leadership skills and strategies". Under the auspices of the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO), it had been involved in the implementation of projects in Senegal and Côte d'Ivoire and had cooperated with various training workshops.

6. There had been many positive developments in the status of women during the last decade, but much remained to be done. Her Government, for its part, was committed to doing its utmost to improve the status of Israeli women, drawing on the experience of other countries and sharing the results of its own experience.

7. **Mr. Albin** (Mexico), speaking on behalf of the Rio Group and of Mexico, said that the countries members of the Rio Group were very interested in the preparations for the special session of the General Assembly to be held in June 2000. They had, *inter alia*, replied to the questionnaire sent to them and to all Member States on implementation of the Beijing Platform for Action and had made national bodies, composed of government officials and representatives of NGOs and other organizations of civil society, responsible for assessing the effectiveness of their activities to promote gender equality.

8. The countries members of the Rio Group welcomed the success of the active negotiations on the development of an optional protocol to the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women and the recent ratification of the Convention by the Republic of Vanuatu; it hoped that the entry into force of the Protocol would strengthen the mandate of the Committee on the Elimination of Discrimination against Women and give new impetus to the advancement of women.

9. They also welcomed the appointment of the Director of the International Research and Training Institute for the Advancement of Women (INSTRAW), which would allow the Institute to continue to fulfil its mandate as recommended by the Joint Inspection Unit. In that regard, he stressed that it was important for the Institute's high-level administrative and staff posts to be funded from the regular budget of the Organization so that the Institute could maintain staff stability and have less recourse to fixed-term contracts, which did not provide adequate career prospects and were dependent on voluntary contributions.

10. In the Veracruz Statement, the countries members of the Rio Group had solemnly declared that the States of origin and destination of immigrants were responsible for strengthening cooperation on migratory issues, and for ensuring full respect for immigrants' human rights and social and economic welfare. They therefore joined in the appeal for prompt ratification by United Nations Member States of the International Convention on the Protection of the Rights of All Migrant Workers and Members of their Families and hoped that the eight ratifications required for its entry into force would soon be obtained.

11. Speaking on behalf of Mexico, he said that his Government hoped that at the special session of the General Assembly to assess progress in implementing the Beijing Platform for Action, to be held in June 2000, the Assembly would adopt a political declaration reaffirming the commitments made at the Beijing Conference and the meaning thereof; prepare a negotiated document on evaluation of follow-up to the Platform for Action; establish measures to be taken in order to ensure the full, complete implementation of all recommendations made therein; and request that the evaluation of the World Summit for Social Development and the work of the Millennium Assembly should be carried out from a gender perspective.

12. In regard to the advancement of women, the Mexican Government was fully prepared to take account of the recommendations made by the Committee on Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women upon consideration of its third and fourth combined periodic reports on the implementation of the Convention.

13. It attached great importance to improving the situation of women in rural areas and had responded to the Secretary-General's requests for information on policies it had implemented to combat the poverty of such women and on its education, health, nutrition and employment programmes promoting their participation in development.

14. As noted in its response to the Secretary-General, his Government was increasingly concerned about violence against female migrant workers. In addition to the efforts it had made to assist them, which were described in the report of the Secretary-General (A/54/342), it had, with the help of a non-governmental organization, published a brochure entitled "Migrant women", which informed the latter of the steps they should take if they were the victims of sexual harassment. It also provided them with the addresses of organizations which might be of assistance to them.

15. **Mr. Jassim** (Bahrain) said that his country was convinced of the importance of the role of women in society and followed the progress made in promoting their status in Arab States and the rest of the world with great interest. Believing that it would be detrimental to society to deprive Bahraini women of their rights and freedoms, his Government had implemented a number of measures to ensure that they could participate effectively in the economic and social life of their country and contribute to its development. Accordingly, it had elaborated plans and programmes to ensure the participation of women in various fields, including education, health and social affairs; establish population plans for women as well as men; established mechanisms and national committees to enable women to participate in elaborating development strategies and resolving development problems; and set up a national committee to monitor the follow-up to the major world conferences on women.

16. Bahraini women had been admitted to State schools ever since their foundation in the 1930s and had since played an active role in a wide range of economic and social fields, with the support of the public and private sectors. They now enjoyed the same rights and benefits as men. As to their situation in the labour market, various laws encouraged them to take up a job, and the female employment rate in 1998 was 33.5 per cent in the public sector and 20 per cent in the private sector. With regard to the situation of women in rural areas, it should be noted that the Bahraini population was extremely urbanized and that there were no rural areas as such in Bahrain.

17. His Government hoped that all States would exert maximum efforts and mobilize a maximum of resources to encourage women to assume the role they were due in society. It urged women's rights organizations and institutions to redouble their efforts to build a non-discriminatory society in the twenty-first century.

18. **Mr. Osman** (Malaysia), speaking on agenda item 109, said that women were certainly a group whose contribution to society should not be overlooked.

19. His Government was continuing to expand the role played by Malaysian women in socio-economic development and to enhance their participation in society. In 1996, it had formulated a national plan which aimed, *inter alia*, to strengthen institutions for the advancement of women, to sensitize the public and government bureaucracy to issues related to women, and to mobilize non-governmental organizations. The plan covered issues such as women and the family, education and training, legal matters, power-sharing and the participation of women in decision-making, women and the media, women and religion, women and culture, and women and sports.

20. The Government had taken various measures to enable more women to participate in the economy and labour market. For example, employers who made child-care centres available at or near the workplace were accorded tax exemptions and businesses had been encouraged to provide proper housing to the rural migrants who worked for them, the majority of whom were women, or to provide assistance in finding housing. Moreover, in order to encourage more women to enter into business, the Ministry of Entrepreneur Development had elaborated various entrepreneurial training programmes.

21. His delegation was convinced that the empowerment of rural women was crucial to the eradication of poverty and welcomed the recommendation contained in the report of the Secretary-General (A/54/123) that the political and socio-economic empowerment of rural women should be pursued by supporting their full participation in rural institutions and in decision-making at all levels. Malaysia also supported the recommendation in that same report that new development and poverty alleviation policies mainstreaming a gender perspective should be devised, in order to enable women to participate in all aspects of economic and social life.

22. Malaysia's development programmes envisaged the adoption of economic policies and development strategies that addressed the needs of women in poverty, including through the revision of certain laws and administrative practices and the development of research methods on the feminization of poverty. Its anti-poverty programmes, which were focused on the hard-core poor, particularly women, accorded priority to income-generating programmes.

23. Rural development programmes, especially the components aimed at women, sought to create a well-informed group capable of initiative and desirous of a better quality of life. They therefore primarily involved strengthening the family institution, developing a sustainable economy and building a quality infrastructure in rural areas, as well as establishing an institutional framework responsive to change. They also emphasized the health of rural women and their families, the medical, dental and maternal and child health care services in rural areas being particularly extensive.

24. Credit was used by the Malaysian Government as a further means of promoting the advancement of rural women. The "Ikhtiar" project currently provided such women with access to microcredit without the requirement of collateral. Other programmes enabled them to easily obtain loans from various public bodies.

25. Malaysian non-governmental organizations complemented the efforts of the Government to promote the status of women by organizing courses in various fields (including business, management, family health care, leadership development and promoting awareness of the contributions of women to national development).

26. As the secretariat of the Regional Steering Committee on the Economic Advancement of Rural and Island Women for Asia and the Pacific, his Government encouraged the preparation and implementation of specific regional and subregional activities such as the organization of training courses for rural women and the exchange of information and research on rural women.

27. **Ms. Kapalata** (United Republic of Tanzania) said that her delegation associated itself with the statement made by the representative of Guyana on behalf of the Group of 77 and China on 11 October, and with the statement which would be delivered on 14 October by the representative of Mozambique on behalf of the Southern African Development Community (SADC). In keeping with its commitments to implement the Beijing Platform for Action, her Government had given priority to four of the 12 critical areas of concern, namely, empowerment of women, political and legal empowerment of women through training and the revision of laws which discriminated against women, affirmative action which ensured women's participation in decision-making through their representation in Parliament, and alleviating the burden of poverty on women through access to microcredit and the promotion and strengthening of social services for women and children. In anticipation of the

special session in the year 2000, the Government would organize a nationwide workshop in March 2000 on International Women's Day, at which participants would be able to assess their performance in implementing the Beijing Platform for Action.

28. The reports submitted on the implementation of the Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action told a mixed story of gains and setbacks. In her country, as far as gains were concerned, the Government had adopted, in July 1998, the Sexual Offences Special Provisions, which criminalized such offences and female genital mutilation and prescribed stringent punishment. The adoption of that piece of legislation had had a profound effect on Tanzanian society; it had brought about changes in attitude towards sexual offences and had mitigated violence against women. Various laws that discriminated against women were being reviewed with a view to their abolition. The Land Law Act of 1999 established women's right to land ownership and thus gave them access to the means of production on which the majority of women depended.

29. With the special session of the General Assembly eight months away, it was evident that the most important objectives of the Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action, such as gender equality and the elimination of gender discrimination, had not yet been achieved. The reports of the Secretary-General indicated that women were still poorer than men, that their level of education was still lower than that of men, and that their health and nutritional status was still poorer than that of men. Since women were still disproportionately affected by economic crises, it was critical that novel ways of eradicating poverty should be considered at the special session. In that connection, the role of the Bretton Woods institutions and the political will of Governments acquired an added importance. The report of the Secretary-General on the improvement of the status of women in the Secretariat indicated that, while some visible progress had been made, the goal of 50/50 gender distribution in the United Nations Secretariat would not be met by the year 2000.

30. Notwithstanding the drawbacks, it was imperative to seize the opportunity provided by the special session to reaffirm the international community's commitment to the Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action in the new millennium. Her delegation wished to recognize the contribution by the United Nations system, in particular the Division for the Advancement of Women and UNIFEM, as well as the crucial role played by non-governmental organizations and civil society. The role of men should not be overlooked in that regard; their participation was critical to the successful implementation of the Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action.

31. **Mr. Hadjiargyrou** (Cyprus) said that his country joined the international community in commemorating the twentieth anniversary of the adoption of the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women and welcomed the recent adoption of the Optional Protocol to the Convention, which his Government intended to ratify as soon as possible. His delegation looked forward to the universal ratification of the Convention; it also looked forward to the special session of the General Assembly, to be held in June 2000, which would give a new impetus to the process that had been launched five years previously in Beijing.

32. Cyprus fully supported the important role of the specialized agencies and national and international non-governmental organizations in defining the problems faced by women worldwide and in assisting the work performed by the United Nations system. It also supported the networking at the international, regional and national levels as a means of mobilizing support and stimulating actions taken by Governments, the United Nations system and non-governmental organizations for the purpose of enhancing visibility and empowering women in the social, economic and political spheres.

33. In the 25 years since the Turkish invasion, his Government had increasingly sought to integrate women into economic revival efforts. The role and status of Cypriot women had improved considerably since 1979. The high rates of economic growth that had taken place in the last two decades had led to the increased participation of women in the country's economic activity, which had led to the expansion and updating of family and labour law, increased public awareness of the specific problems of women and the pursuit of policies for the promotion of gender equality.

34. The number of women entering the labour market had been growing steadily; their level of education had improved and there were more and more women in high administrative and managerial positions.

35. Although rural women had benefited considerably from the various rural development programmes and had access to basic social services, the new programme launched by the Ministry of Agriculture aimed at improving the status of rural women by promoting their role in farming and encouraging them to undertake income-generating activities.

36. Violence against women had become a top priority issue within the Government's overall policy on equality. Preventive and therapeutic programmes had been

implemented and in-service training was organized for social workers to enable them to offer the right support to the victims of violence. The Ministry of Justice and Public Order provided financial support in that area to women's organizations and non-governmental organizations to initiate their own programmes.

37. Cyprus was strongly committed to pursuing policies and programmes which ensured that women fully enjoyed their basic rights and were treated as equal partners in shaping the country's economic, political and social development.

38. **Mr. Niehaus** (Costa Rica) said that the improvement of the status of women was an obligation which stemmed from the dignity and fundamental rights of women. However, in view of the fact that women continued to suffer from oppression, intolerance and discrimination, concrete and effective measures must be adopted to stamp out those injustices and ensure that women actually participated in all decision-making processes.

39. In Costa Rica, which was an agricultural country, women accounted for 40 per cent of agricultural production and were increasingly employed in the production of non-traditional export crops. However, the steady decline in commodity terms of trade led to a decline in the earnings not only of rural women but also of developing countries, thereby hampering their capacity to make investments that would enhance the status of rural women. It was therefore vital to modify the world economic order in the interest of greater justice.

40. With regard to the status of rural women, mention should be made of the situation of households headed by women, who provided for a large number of children and old people. The improvement of the social, occupational and economic conditions of those women would therefore have an impact on a sizeable segment of society which was particularly vulnerable to economic and social crises.

41. Costa Rica had enacted a number of specific provisions with a view to the implementation of the Platform for Action of the Fourth World Conference on Women. Those measures included the establishment of a national women's institute directed by a minister for the status of women, a recommendation by the electoral commission inviting political parties to reserve 40 per cent of elective posts for women, and the establishment of a national women's hospital.

42. His delegation stressed the need to combat sexism and all other forms of discrimination and to struggle for equality and unity in diversity.

43. **Ms. Garruq** (Libyan Arab Jamahiriya) said that despite the efforts of the international community to implement the Beijing Platform for Action, the status of women had not really progressed appreciably because of the economic and social problems experienced by the developing countries, particularly the least developed countries. Rural women were the first to suffer from such problems.

44. While States had primary responsibility for the implementation of the Platform for Action, a favourable environment was needed to support the efforts of developing countries. In that respect, the Libyan Arab Jamahiriya supported the ministerial communiqué adopted at the high-level segment of the 1999 substantive session of the Economic and Social Council which called upon United Nations bodies to support national poverty eradication efforts, with particular attention to employment creation.

45. The Libyan Arab Jamahiriya welcomed the efforts made by the United Nations and various programmes to combat all forms of discrimination against women.

46. The implementation of the Beijing Platform for Action began with the education given to children within the family itself, which should not be a place of confrontation between men and women.

47. The Commission on the Status of Women should be commended on the preparations for the special session of the General Assembly entitled "Women 2000: gender equality, development and peace for the twenty-first century", at which the progress made since the Beijing Conference would be evaluated and obstacles encountered would be identified with a view to their elimination.

48. The Libyan Arab Jamahiriya had adopted many legislative and administrative measures to promote the status of women and combat sex discrimination in many fields, including employment, politics, decision-making, health and education.

49. **Mr. Baali** (Algeria) said that the celebration in 1999 of the twentieth anniversary of the adoption of the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women, which constituted a charter for the mainstreaming of women, coincided by a few weeks with the advent of the third millennium, but traditional behaviours and mentalities were still depriving hundreds of millions of women of their basic rights.

50. The record of the implementation of the Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action showed that, at both the national and international levels, women were being afforded equal opportunities in all spheres of activity and there had

been a slight improvement in the status of women in the countries of the South. Thus, the United Nations system and intergovernmental bodies such as the Commission on the Status of Women acting as the preparatory committee for the special session of the General Assembly in June 2000 had proved their worth.

51. Among the areas for which new initiatives could be formulated at the special session were education and training for women (two thirds of the world's illiterates were women), women and poverty (the phenomenon of the feminization of poverty was growing and was linked, particularly in the rural areas of Africa, to food security for the family), and the welfare and education of young girls.

52. It was in Africa that the status of women was the most precarious because of the continent's multidimensional problems, by which women were the first to be affected: the incidence of armed conflicts, chronic underdevelopment, extreme poverty, the shortage or even absence of basic social services, illiteracy, and AIDS (four out of five HIV-positive women in the world were African). The international community therefore needed to provide moral and material support to Africa and African women and help them achieve the objectives of the Beijing Platform for Action. In that respect, the sixth regional conference to be held at Addis Ababa in November 1999 would provide an opportunity to evaluate the implementation of the Dakar and Beijing programmes of action and, no doubt, to plan new initiatives.

53. Since the Beijing Conference, in which it had fully participated, Algeria had worked to follow up on the Declaration and Platform for Action. It had formulated a wide-ranging national plan and mobilized substantial resources in order to invest in basic social programmes, improvement of the quality of basic education and occupational training for women and girls and prevention of school abandonment, maintenance of the basic principles of social justice, equity and solidarity on which national health policy was based, implementation of incentives for the maintenance and strengthening of provisions in the area of employment, inclusion of rural women in the agricultural development policy, and strengthening of the presence of women in the economic sphere.

54. Two recent developments should be noted: the appointment of the first woman prefect (wali); and the submission to the Committee on the Elimination of Discrimination against Women in January 1999 of the initial report of Algeria on the implementation of the Convention, which that Committee had received very favourably, which would definitely encourage the public authorities and women's associations to further promote the mainstreaming of Algerian women (requiring a revision of the Family Code).

55. **Ms. Korneliouk** (Belarus) said that the celebration of the twentieth anniversary of the adoption of the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women and the adoption, fully supported by Belarus, of the Optional Protocol to that instrument, made 1999 an important year for women.

56. In Belarus, women, who represented 53 per cent of the population, constituted the largest socio-demographic group and, unfortunately, the group which suffered the most from the adverse consequences of the period of transition. In line with the recommendations of the Fourth World Conference on Women, Belarus had drawn up a national plan of action 1996-2000 with a view to improving the situation of women, and a programme entitled "Women of the Republic of Belarus", which the council of ministers had approved in June and in August 1996, respectively. Belarus was one of the few countries which had responded to the questionnaire of the United Nations Secretariat on the review and implementation of the Beijing Platform for Action, and had made proposals on action to be taken in the future.

57. In order to deal with unemployment, which was certainly the worst of the problems affecting women, Belarus drew up employment programmes every year which contained various measures to improve the situation of women in the job market. Poverty, which was increasingly affecting women, was a relatively new social phenomenon in Belarus; it was the consequence of the series of economic and social reforms undertaken in the country as well as of the Chernobyl disaster. That was why it was important that national efforts should be supported by the international community, and particularly the United Nations.

58. While welcoming the progress achieved in the area of parity between the sexes in the United Nations Secretariat, and the personal interest the Secretary-General had in the question, as well as his keenness to establish a new management structure, the Government of Belarus deplored the slow pace of the entire complex process.

59. It welcomed the work done by the Commission on the Status of Women as the preparatory committee for the special session of the General Assembly and underlined the need from the outset to organize informal consultations open to all in order to facilitate the adoption by consensus of the decisions which the Commission would be taking at its forty-fourth session. It also supported the Commission's decision to establish a system-wide medium-term plan for the advancement of women for the period 2002-2005, which was centred on specific actions. He noted with satisfaction that

to the section of its agreed conclusions on "institutional mechanisms" the Commission on the Status of Women had encouraged the multilateral development institutions, bilateral donors and international non-governmental organizations to provide technical assistance and other resources, including financial resources, to the developing countries and countries with economies in transition.

60. **Ms. Wodie** (Australia) said that the fundamental principle that women and men should enjoy all human rights equally had been articulated in the Universal Declaration of Human Rights and several other international instruments, among them the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women. In spite of the great strides that had been taken to advance women's rights, the task was not complete. The international community's commitment to equal rights for women had been demonstrated by the fact that the Convention was among the most widely ratified of all human rights treaties. That commitment had been reaffirmed at the World Conference on Human Rights, held in Vienna in 1993, and at the Fourth World Conference on Women, held at Beijing in 1995.

61. On the occasion of the Convention's twentieth anniversary, the General Assembly of the United Nations had adopted an Optional Protocol which provided for a communications procedure and an inquiry mechanism. The fact that all parties to the negotiations process, in which Australia had participated, had adopted the Optional Protocol by consensus showed that the international community continued to recognize the importance of women's fundamental rights within the United Nations human rights system. Australia would undertake extensive consultations on the Optional Protocol involving the Federal Parliament, State and Territory Governments and civil society, such consultations being an obligatory procedure before Australia could become a party to a new treaty.

62. Since signing the Convention in 1980 and ratifying it in 1983, Australia had put in place specialized machinery of Government at federal and local levels which advised on issues relating to the status of women and evaluated the outcome for women of government policies and programmes. The objective of those policies was to ensure that women were able to make their own choices and have an equal opportunity to achieve their individual objectives.

63. In December 1998 Australia had signed the Statute of the International Criminal Court, having worked hard to ensure that the crimes of rape, sexual slavery, enforced prostitution and other forms of sexual violence in situations of armed conflict were incorporated into the definition of "war crimes" in the Statute.

64. The tragic situations in East Timor and Kosovo had provided Australia with the opportunity to take practical action to protect women. Of the more than 1,500 East Timorese refugees who had been evacuated to Australia, 52 per cent were women, and a large proportion of the 4,000 Kosovars given temporary safe haven in Australia were women and children separated from their families. Australia welcomed the opportunity presented by the forthcoming special session in June 2000 for the international community to review progress made over the past five years in implementing the Beijing Platform for Action. The Australian Government was currently conducting consultations on the special session with interested individuals and non-governmental organizations.

65. Australia had a long history of commitment to the objectives of the Declaration on the Elimination of Violence against Women. Violence against women was a crime against the whole of society. The Government had taken decisive steps to confront the problem by making all forms of physical and sexual violence against women criminal offences and by launching a campaign to eliminate domestic violence through the "partnerships against domestic violence" initiative, which was underpinned by a financial commitment of 50 million Australian dollars from the national Government up to June 2001. It had also introduced strategies aimed at eradicating the practice of female genital mutilation which existed among some ethnic communities in Australia. Those strategies were aimed both at supporting women who had been mutilated and at preventing the mutilation of girls who were at risk.

66. Australia had promulgated a law on sexual tourism providing means to enable the prosecution of Australians who escaped the criminal justice system of the country in which the offence had been committed. The Australian Government had signed memoranda of understanding with the Governments of Fiji and the Philippines which directly supported the child sex tourism legislation. It had also developed strong law enforcement links with many other countries in the region, including Thailand and Indonesia, in order to tackle child abuse and bring offenders to justice.

67. It was important that the United Nations could deploy robust and uncompromising advocates of women's rights. Australia believed that women's issues should be integrated into all United Nations human rights mechanisms. There was too wide a gap between the specialized and mainstream mechanisms. In particular, Australia emphasized the importance of an effective partnership between the Commission on the Status of Women and the Commission on Human Rights.

44. Although it was disappointing that the goal of gender equality in the United Nations was not going to be achieved by the year 2000, Australia welcomed the Secretary-General's commitment to achieving gender equality in the Secretariat as set out in his latest report on the improvement of the status of women in the Secretariat (A/54/487). It welcomed in particular the work to develop human resources management action plans for individual departments and offices in order to improve gender balance in tandem with other aspects of human resources management. Effective collaboration between the Office of Human Resources Management and the Office of the Special Adviser on Gender Issues and the Advancement of Women was an important element in the ongoing efforts to achieve gender equality. Australia welcomed the United Nations initiatives to introduce gender-sensitivity training at the departmental level and encouraged the establishment of effective monitoring mechanisms to ensure the active commitment of all managers to the promotion and recruitment of suitably qualified women, particularly for positions at the D-1 level and above. It was important for Member States and the United Nations to continue their efforts to identify suitably qualified women for positions throughout the United Nations system, including posts as special representatives of the Secretary-General.

45. **Mr. dos Santos** (Mozambique), speaking on behalf of the Southern African Development Community (SADC), said that, 20 years after the adoption of the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women, major strides had been made in women's human rights. SADC welcomed the adoption of the Optional Protocol to the Convention at the current session.

46. Although efforts had been made to ensure parity between men and women within the United Nations system, it was regrettable that with the approach of the year 2000, that goal had not been reached. In particular, more women from the African region should be recruited.

47. The implementation of the Gender and Development Declaration and the Plan of Action which the SADC Heads of State had adopted in 1997 and 1998 respectively, had led to some progress in the participation of women in the decision-making process, particularly in parliaments and Governments. The SADC successors responsible for the advancement of women had adopted a regional programme of action which identified the actions required to reach the target of 30 per cent of women in decision-making posts. The SADC Heads of State had endorsed that objective and had undertaken to strengthen the presence of women in their cabinets. They had also signed an addendum to the Gender and Development Declaration on eradicating violence against women and children.

48. In other sectors, however, the situation had not improved significantly for women, who still had difficulties in gaining access to capital, land and technology. The provisions adopted by SADC to benefit women, for example affirmative action policies by leading institutions, were impeded by lack of funds. SADC therefore appealed to the international community to assist it in implementing programmes for the empowerment of women.

49. In some SADC countries, the health status of women and children was very poor, not only because of malnutrition, but also because of high levels of HIV/AIDS, which were affecting the economically active members of the population. SADC leaders were engaged in the search for a solution.

50. A few months before the high-level review at which the General Assembly would assess the implementation of the Beijing Platform for Action, efforts tended to be redoubled and commitments renewed. Rather than re-negotiating the Platform for Action, it was essential to take stock and work for its complete implementation.

51. Although the SADC countries intended to fulfil their responsibilities, they could not implement the Platform for Action on their own, in view of the economic difficulties which they faced. In that respect, foreign direct investment and official development assistance should be increased.

52. The SADC countries, which would continue to support the preparatory process, took the view that the special session of the General Assembly should enable Governments, the United Nations system and non-governmental organizations to reaffirm their commitment to work for equality between women and men. SADC believed that there could be no sustainable development without the participation of women and men as equal partners, and reaffirmed its commitment to work for the advancement of women.

53. **Mr. Kamikia** (Fiji) said that his delegation associated itself with the statement made by the representative of Guyana on behalf of the Group of 77 and China. After the Fourth World Conference on Women, at which the international community had undertaken to work for the empowerment of women and their enjoyment of their human rights, it was necessary, at the dawn of a new millennium, to take stock of the steps taken.

54. For his Government, the empowerment of women was an economic and political necessity which should contribute, through increased participation of women in political, social

and economic activities, to the prosperity of the whole community.

79. His Government agreed with Mr. Nitin Desai, Under-Secretary-General, Department of Economic and Social Affairs, that the question of the empowerment of women was closely linked with the bigger issues of poverty, unemployment and underemployment. Since poverty was disproportionately female, any strategy to eradicate it must be based on the empowerment of women. The implementation of the Beijing Platform for Action required resources which had not been made available by the economic liberalization and globalization processes, because developing countries, particularly small island developing States, had not benefited from those processes. Moreover, official development assistance, which played an important role in the development of countries like Fiji, was continuing to decline. The international community must therefore create an enabling international economic environment so that developing countries could fulfil their commitments.

80. Apart from a Ministry of Women, Culture and Social Welfare, the Government of Fiji had put in place a plan of action for women to ensure gender parity in a number of government institutions, promote safe domestic and work environments for women, finance small business development projects and review legislation.

81. The Government of Fiji had decided to withdraw its reservations concerning articles 7 (a) and 9 of the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women.

82. In his Government's view, the goals of the Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action would be achievable if the international community supported the efforts of small island developing States such as Fiji to gain access to markets, technology and the necessary skills.

83. **Ms. Otim** (Uganda) said that her delegation associated itself with the statement made by the representative of Guyana on behalf of the Group of 77 and China. Rural and urban women in Uganda were subjected to a number of problems which they could not control, such as hunger, the lack of family planning, high-risk pregnancy and HIV/AIDS. Rural women had only rudimentary means of working the land, most of which they did not own, and had no access to capital. In addition, cultural practices exposed women to physical violence, early marriage and polygamy.

84. It was therefore not surprising that the participants in the first Organization of African Unity (OAU) Ministerial Conference on Human Rights in Africa had appealed to all African States to take steps to eliminate discrimination against women and to promote the advancement of women. Those objectives were also pursued by the Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action, the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women and the Nairobi Forward-looking Strategies for the Advancement of Women.

85. In order to mainstream gender concerns as a means of accelerating social, political and economic development, the Ugandan authorities had taken a number of affirmative-action measures to promote women's participation in public life. For example, the 1995 Constitution, which recognized the equality of men and women, provided for mandatory positions for women in local governments.

86. Women in civil society had played an active role in that movement by forming organizations which advocated better health standards, the provision of safe water, education for girls and family planning, and which ran programmes to provide microcredit, prevent HIV/AIDS, provide shelter for battered women and train local women councillors to deal with women's problems.

87. In implementing policies for the advancement of women, Uganda had benefited from the work of United Nations agencies such as the United Nations Development Fund for Women (UNIFEM) and the United Nations Population Fund (UNFPA). She hoped that the many efforts being made would lead to the realization of all the goals established.

88. **Mr. Jong Myong Hak** (Democratic People's Republic of Korea) said that, despite the international community's efforts, since the establishment of the United Nations, to promote equality between women and men, the problem of inequality remained serious in many countries, where women suffered from social ills such as poverty, unemployment, disease, illiteracy, discrimination and violence.

89. Efforts to ensure respect for the fundamental rights of women must go beyond the adoption of legislation to include concrete measures to ensure their equal participation in political, economic and social development, *inter alia* by making the investments necessary for the advancement of women. His Government guaranteed women's participation in all areas of activity through investments and practical measures such as the operation, at State expense, of day-care centres in all workplaces and the introduction of special rules on women's working hours.

90. The promotion of gender equality had benefited from the valuable support of United Nations agencies and programmes such as UNIFEM, UNFPA and the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization

(UNESCO), which promoted, inter alia, women's health and education throughout the world.

41. Violence against women was a grave and systematic violation of women's human rights. To stop it, States must establish strong punitive measures, sensitize their citizens to the problem from an early age and enact legal standards guaranteeing equality between women and men in all sectors of public life. The settlement of past crimes was also important. In that connection, his delegation urged the Government of Japan to apologize for having committed grave violations of human rights by subjecting "comfort women" to sexual slavery before and during the Second World War and to offer appropriate compensation, in accordance with the relevant United Nations resolutions.

42. His delegation was convinced that the situation of women would improve when all Governments made practical efforts to implement the Beijing Platform for Action. The Government of the Democratic People's Republic of Korea would continue to work towards the realization of the goals and principles of the Charter of the United Nations and the Beijing Platform for Action.

43. Mr. Al-Dulaymi (Iraq) said that the Iraqi Government had adopted all appropriate legislative measures to ensure the elimination of all forms of discrimination against women, in particular by promulgating the 1987 Reform Act, which was designed to promote equality in Iraqi society.

44. Iraq was a party to the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women and had been one of the first countries to establish a national strategy for the advancement of women, which had been submitted to the Secretary-General in mid-1987 and would certainly make a contribution to the formulation of an action plan for the advancement of women in the political, economic, social and cultural spheres.

45. The special session of the General Assembly to be held in June 2000 would give the international community an opportunity to assess the progress made since the Beijing Conference and to consider the obstacles to the implementation of the Platform for Action, which was based primarily on national initiatives.

46. The countries whose economic and social development was being impeded, in particular by economic blockades, had to cope with big obstacles in the implementation of the Platform for Action. For example, the blockade imposed on Iraq over the past nine years had had extremely damaging effects on the status of Iraqi women, who had not only been forced to withdraw from public life in order to provide for the daily needs of their families but had also seen their health deteriorate as a result of malnutrition and disease (50 per cent of pregnant women were anaemic, and the maternal mortality rate had risen from 26 to 170 per 100,000 in recent years).

47. That situation ran counter to the decisions adopted at the big international conferences on women, which called on the international community to improve the status of women, and was inconsistent with the Beijing Platform for Action, which stressed the need for action to be taken in accordance with international law to reduce the impact of economic sanctions on women and children. Iraq therefore supported the lifting of the blockade.

48. Ms. Ankersloot (International Labour Organization (ILO)) said that ILO regarded gender equality at jobs as central to poverty eradication and sustainable development. In many societies women bore the brunt of poverty and were particularly vulnerable to the fluctuations and inequities of the labour market. Data were very often not disaggregated by sex, and ILO was therefore trying to develop better gender-disaggregated labour market indicators and to assess the differential impact of development policies on men and women. In line with its mandate, ILO aimed to reduce the discrimination suffered by women through three types of action.

49. Firstly, with regard to the setting of international labour standards, the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women and the ILO Conventions had a common basis in the same principles and were complementary and mutually reinforcing. ILO believed that the ratification of the Conventions by Member States provided vital support for gender equality at work, and it welcomed the adoption by the General Assembly of the Optional Protocol to the Convention. It was collaborating with UNIFEM and the Division for the Advancement of Women with a view to promoting action to help women workers, for instance by collaborating closely on the preparation of the report of the 1999 World Survey on the Role of Women in Development: Globalization, Gender and Work.

50. Secondly, ILO had played the lead role in preparing for the high-level segment discussion in the Economic and Social Council on the role of employment and work in poverty eradication and the empowerment and advancement of women. It was also working with Governments and employers' and workers' organizations with a view to launching programmes for creating sustainable jobs in micro and small enterprises which were targeted at women entrepreneurs in developing and transitional economies. In

post-conflict situations. ILO recognized the importance of jobs creation for women as well as for former combatants, for women's lives were often seriously dislocated by war and they bore the greatest burden in the reconstruction work.

131. A key part of the implementation of the Beijing Platform for Action by ILO was its global programme on more and better jobs for women. The programme was designed to reduce the vulnerability of women in the labour market, especially in precarious informal work where social security was non-existent or inadequate. It also stressed the principle of equal pay for work of equal value. The ILO projects aimed to mobilize women, who often suffered the greatest hardships but were also the best agents for mitigating the consequences of economic and social dislocation, financial crisis, conflicts or natural disasters.

132. Thirdly, where working conditions and social protection were concerned, the lack of protection mechanisms made women and children particularly vulnerable to exploitation and abuse. That was why ILO established standards for improving workplace conditions and helped to formulate national policies for application of those standards, which included occupational safety and health standards for women workers designed to eliminate hazards for pregnant and lactating women and reduce the stress caused by long hours, monotonous tasks and sexual harassment. They were also intended to guarantee freedom of association and the right to organize and bargain collectively. The most recent ILO *World Employment Report (1998-99)* had highlighted the importance of training and had focused particularly on "Women and training in the global economy". Appropriate labour market legislation was critical and must take account of women's need for flexibility, special protection for maternity and child care, and the elimination of inequality of opportunity and treatment between women and men workers.

133. Physical or psychological violence in the workplace was a global and very extensive phenomenon: according to a recent worldwide survey by ILO, women were particularly vulnerable. Some workplaces and occupations were "high-risk", and women were concentrated in that type of job as domestic servants, teachers, nurses and shop workers. The survey report provided information and analyses for policy makers, employers' and workers' organizations, and corporate officials. It proposed dialogue and initiatives to regulate violence in the workplace and stressed the need for gender-sensitive legislation, immediate intervention, and measures to provide long-term assistance for victims.

134. In June 1998 the International Labour Conference had adopted the Declaration on Fundamental Principles and Rights at Work, in which member States made a renewed commitment to respect, promote and apply the following principles: freedom to bargain collectively; elimination of all forms of forced and compulsory labour; effective abolition of child labour; and elimination of discrimination in employment. Each of those principles helped to safeguard and promote the fundamental rights of women workers.

The meeting rose at 12.35 p.m.